

A close-up, profile view of a man's face and shoulder, looking out towards a bright sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the scene with a warm, golden light. The man is wearing a dark, textured jacket. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Being Male
Seeking Peace

GREG GOVINDA

This work is dedicated to my father

Norman Lloyd Bray

(1928 - 2020)

*in thanks for his great generosity of spirit
and loving contribution to this world*

Cover image by : Jeremy Perkins

Please note that this work is written to share ideas. It is a review on some of the ideas around to support Men's Health & Wellbeing. Authors have been quoted and a bibliography is provided at end of the article. It is offered as a free eBook on my website. Please share it around.

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PROLOGUE

As a man are you happy in life?

Do you feel fulfilled or content?

Have you 'achieved' your dreams, or found what you were looking for?

Are you at peace with the life you do live?

The structure of this writing is basically around the themes of :

Why Men Suffer

Some Healing Pathways

What works for me

This is my attempt to understand something of the state of being male and its positive potentials. I explore ideas that I have found to be helpful.

This writing looks at some of the ways men suffer and what they might do about it. It looks at history and psychology and, to a lesser degree, spirituality. Where men have suffered and how this affects us all.

It also looks at how we, in being male, might regain connection with our wholeness.

This book also looks at the importance of embracing inner changes that challenge many men during mid-life.

The writing is offered as a work-in-progress which will be helped by you commenting on it, or using it in discussions with other men.

The main aim is that It may become of some use in helping us find peace in being male and living a full life.

INTRO

1. We All Suffer

Both men and women have suffered greatly over a long period of time, and we continue to suffer though there are many things that we can do about it. Women have perhaps suffered even more than men but this work is mostly about being male.

How could we ever think that we might see a safe and peaceful world if we males seek only to embody masculine qualities and not find respectful balance with the feminine as well?

One of the main themes I look at in relation to healing the past, is for all of us to find understanding and appreciation of each others gender challenges, including mixed and transgender people - and to develop respect and acceptance for all “human” qualities within each of us.

How could we ever find a sense of peace if we will not allow ourselves to feel the truth of being human? Being strong and clear at times, as well as vulnerable and fearful as well. There can be no day without night, or strength without vulnerability. That is just how it is in this world of dualities.

The task, as I see it, is that we need to develop understanding and respect for others as well as with our own self. The degree of suffering in the world makes it obvious that something is out of balance and needs a new way of being. I see the inner-work each of us needs to do to, firstly, find peace within oneself, and also to find peace in relation to all others.

As a man I am free to choose the values I wish to live by and to express. These may well change over time and I need to be sensitive to when that occurs. We are each programmed from childhood and by society to preference certain beliefs, but in the end, it is up to each of us to decide what we choose. In being true to who I am, I get to experience life more fully and honestly and directly. I live my own best life and bless others to do the same.

2. As A Man

I am a man who has had my share of wounds and blessings this life.

The second or third stage of my life began at 23 years of age when I suffered a 'nervous breakdown.' The breakdown left me exhausted and unable to continue working at my job. It also left me unable to be part of mainstream society for many years.

As part of my healing I went walkabout, living alone or with other wanderers, where I could find shelter or a shared meal. In 1989, at the age of 33, I met my first wife and worked alongside her. She was a psychologist and helped me enormously in rebuilding my sense of self and having meaningful work. Ten years after we met she died unexpectedly and I had to work through profound feelings of grief and abandonment, as well as find enough reasons to simply keep going.

My adult life has been a long journey of difficult lessons as I negotiated trying to find joy in this complex and challenging world. I still look for that joy though I have everything I need including a loving partner. I know the joy is within me but I still need to work at connecting with it regularly. I do this through a practice of mindfulness, meditation, gratitude, living simply and surrounding myself with very positive and kind friends.

I still carry many wounds and lessons I need to learn, to become strong in spirit as well as accept that while physical life is finite, spirit is infinite and I am also that.

Since 2017 I have been working with running Men's support Groups and enjoying being a part of that.

3. What Is Of Most Importance?

We work - we strive - we learn to survive. If you're lucky you take some time out to just be. For me, I need to express my creativity and develop something of wisdom - as I learn to care for others, as well as myself.

When possible, I respond to life with loving-kindness. I find contentment in simple things. Letting go of excessive craving, and finding fulfilment in appreciating what is.

Even when things upset me, I rebalance as soon as I am able and focus again on what I am grateful for.

I find meaning and purpose in knowing that life is beyond my full understanding. That there is indeed a sense of peace in finding others who have a loving heart, or willing to be present.

To support each other
in finding our way through.
To live for Love.
For each and everyone of us.

The question I often ask is:

“In a complex world,
how to find
what is of most value
to you?”

4. Men Need Meaning and Purpose

There is a lovely story from the middle ages where men were busy carrying large stones. The storyteller observes two men who look completely different in their experience of the task. One man with his head down who looked to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. Another who looked full of energy and enthusiasm. He asked them individually “what are you doing?”

The gloomy man replied : “the only work I can get is to carry these heavy stones.” The bright man responded : “we are building a cathedral !” The same task - but for one man the task had meaning and purpose.

An old saying goes : “How do you destroy a man?” The answer : “Pay him to do nothing.”

Victor Frankl was in a concentration camp during World War II and wrote a book about surviving it. An incredible document, the book 'Man's Search for Meaning' (2004). This quote is attributed to him :

"... when people had work to do - even digging holes in the frozen rocky ground - they were better off than those who did not. ... At one stage the guards made the men simply move rocks from one place to another, then back again ... the suicide rate soared. People just gave up." ¹

One present day problem is that many men often see their worth as : " a function of their performance" ² but we are far more than that.

An Australian Indigenous leader David Mowaljalai has, for many years, been taking young men on journeys of transition in the desert. At the conclusion of their time with him, he suggests to the young men that : "Men are in this world to nurture and protect life" ... "That is what men are for."

5. Most Men Suffer

My own introduction to Personal Development came 30+ years ago when I met with a psychologist named Susie. Susie had an incredible skill in being able to listen. I hadn't experienced this before and, although I had spent over six years withdrawn and alone - in a one hour session Susie helped me to find some clarity around why I had given up and withdrawn.

I had co-created a fight with a man who was my boss and that relationship destroyed my ability to be in society anymore. One and a half years of misunderstanding between us destroyed me as well as my career. I was fortunate to meet Susie about six years later and a few years after that, to meet with my first wife. Life was waiting to support me when I was ready and willing to open myself again to receive that support. It took a lot of inner-work but the alternative was to fall even deeper into a hellish state.

¹ 'Man's Search for Meaning'

² 'Finding Meaning in the 2nd Half of Life' p. 67

Susie read me a quote attributed to the American author Henry David Thoreau. The quote was :

“Most men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

It was certainly true for me and I suspect it may also true for many men. Being human has its own challenges and being male adds other layers. I have often found men to be defensive and often wondered why.

6. Hurting

In 2018, in the Australian state of Victoria, 578,000 men sought help over Mental Health issues. At the time of writing this, the Victoria Police respond to a mental health call every 12 minutes. Statistics show that men routinely fail at close relationships, with divorces initiated by the woman in 4 out of 5 cases. Men seem to have great difficulty in relating to others, and even to their own partners and people who love them.

Over 90% of the acts of violence are carried out by men. In schools, around 90% of children with behaviour problems are boys. Boys also make up over 85% of children with learning problems. It seems no wonder then that over 90% of jail populations are made up of men.

Why do we have so much trouble with finding peace and living a full and happy life? Why so much trouble and travail?

Is it simply to do with our gender; with hormones, or attitudes, or things men need to learn? Why so driven to competition and accomplishment? Why so defensive? Why so guarded and wary of others?

In Australia in 2019 the leading cause of death amongst young men is suicide. Can we at least agree that we might have a problem?

WHY MEN SUFFER

7. From Boy to Man

Robert Moore & Douglas Gillette in their excellent look at archetypes 'King, Warrior, Magician, Lover' (1991) considers the state of our masculinity.

Moore & Gillette write that : "Boy psychology is everywhere around us, and its marks are easy to see. Among them are an abusive and violent acting-out behaviours against others, both men and women: passivity and weakness, the inability to act effectively and creatively in one's own life and to engender life and creativity in others ..." ³

Moore & Gillette suggest that : "Patriarchy is the expression of the immature masculine." ... the "expression of Boy psychology, and, in part, the shadow ... Patriarchy (in its present state) expresses the stunted masculine, fixated at immature levels." ⁴

They also make an important point that : 'in the present crisis in masculinity we do not need less masculine power. We need more.' We need more masculine power but it needs to be : "of the mature masculine. We need more Man psychology." ⁵

They offer a look at four main archetypes where a man may find traditional strengths. The King, Warrior, Magician and Lover where each archetype has the potential to serve only itself - or - the greater good.

8. Relationship to Father

Another major problem that faces men is the estrangement from the father for the past 100 years. Steve Biddulph in 'A New Manhood' (2013) looks at how many men have a dysfunctional relationship with their father. Biddulph reports that only 10% of men actually have an open and happy relationship with their father. The

³ 'King, Warrior, Magician, Lover' p. xvi

⁴ 'King, Warrior, Magician, Lover' p. xvii

⁵ 'King, Warrior, Magician, Lover' p. xviii

other 90% are estranged, argumentative or simply dutiful. They relate because they are related but do not enjoy more deep intimacy or joy than that.

Perhaps one of our greatest problems is that we are only just now beginning to see it as a problem. Another block to doing anything about it comes from not perceiving this lack of closeness and joy of life as somehow “normal.”

Terrence Real in ‘I Don’t Want To Talk About It’ (1997) quotes that : “The typical American father spends on average only eleven minutes a day with his children.”⁶ How would any child bond or learn from their father if they only got to spend eleven minutes a day together?

Biddulph (2013) writes that men’s enemies are often on the inside : “in the walls we put up around our own hearts.”⁷

Many philosophies also point to this idea that the world outside of us is a reflection of what is going on inside. The world we live in, and have created, is a mirror to what, collectively, we allow to run without being conscious.

If we are to change the way the world is, and indeed, what we daily meet in the outer world, we need to get ourselves more conscious. As the eminent psychotherapist C. G. Jung⁸ wrote :

“Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakens.”

The Human Condition includes being driven by fears and avoidance of pain. It also includes such elements to work through as : grief, depression, despair, powerlessness, pride, insecurity, guilt, unworthiness, jealousy, hatred, rage, revenge, anger, blame, worry, doubt, disappointment, overwhelm, frustration, irritation, impatience, pessimism, boredom, and so on. Just as well that our nature also includes : contentment, hopefulness, optimism, positive expectation, belief, enthusiasm, eagerness, trust, happiness, passion, joy, knowledge, empowerment, freedom, love, and appreciation, etc. These qualities are “inner” states of being. It is our inner-work to

⁶ ‘I Don’t Want To Talk About It’ p. 143

⁷ ‘The New Manhood’ p. 17

⁸ Carl Gustav Jung

connect with the ones that lift us, while negotiating with the ones that drag us down.

The American psychologist James Hollis in 'The Middle Passage' (1993) writes:

“Conditioned to shun feeling, avoid instinctual wisdom and override his inner truth, the average male is a stranger to himself and others, a slave to money, power and status.”⁹

I have always wondered about our obsession with having, acquiring, and getting more, and often asked myself “why?!” Is it some strange mix of getting our needs met that gets out of hand because of our unconscious fears? Perhaps it comes back to my question of “what exactly is important in life?” Have we as men, in seeking to fulfil our roles as protectors and providers, simply lost the bigger picture?

Looking at the state of the world, I suggest that we need to find a better way. We need to change the way we have done things in the past if we are to raise ourselves out from the troubles we have inherited from our history as well as created ourselves.

9. History

We are all affected by what has preceded us.

In the days of old, a man had to have patience in order to catch a fish, or hunt down some animal for food, or create his tools. He may have had to wait for days until a fish or seal would come to his fishing hole. He may have had to go on a long journey in order to catch food for himself and his tribe. He had to have patience and the ability to wait and be close to nature. Nowadays everyone seems constantly busy and often carrying excess stress. A different world for sure.

I just now recall the wonderful wisdom in Herman Hesse's book 'Siddhartha' when the main character repeatedly tells himself : “I can think, I can fast and I can wait.” This idea supported me greatly when I was a young man in the middle of a difficult transition.

One of the main arguments I read in many books is the idea that the focus of men has changed enormously in the past 100 years. 100 years ago perhaps 90 percent of us worked on the land.

Our livelihoods came from a direct connection to the earth and with it a direct relationship to what we gave and what we received in return. We were very much connected to Mother Earth and derived not only our worldly sustenance but also our connection to spirituality and to wholeness.

For many, the introduction of Industrialisation stretched or broke the relationship of men and boys. It also damaged the initiatory transitioning of those boys into becoming men. Bill Kauth, the author of 'A Circle of Men' (2015) suggests that our “ability to pass on a meaningful sense of manhood has been waning for over 200 years.”¹⁰

10. Loss of Meaning and Connection

Biddulph observes that “... the last century has been a cyclone change. ... For 100 years the hammer-blows of war, economic depression, more war, relocation and emigration have rained down upon us.”¹¹ Biddulph suggests that every person was affected and this left us with “intergenerational wounds (that) were not addressed.”¹²

Bill Kauth suggests that our great-grandfathers' move from the farms to the cities led us into “essentially meaningless work” losing “that strong male identity a man finds in his work.”¹³

The Industrial Revolution in Britain (1760 - 1840) saw men forced to leave their families to find work in foundries, mines and mills. This meant that men who previously raised and guided their sons into the meaning of manhood, no longer got to spend time with them. The young men themselves were often also down the mines and feeding the machines. Biddulph suggests that the : “pattern of male nurturing and teaching was ruptured and lost. ...”¹⁴

¹⁰ 'A Circle of Men' p. 116

¹¹ 'The New Manhood' p. ix

¹² 'The New Manhood' p. ix

¹³ 'A Circle of Men' p. 116

¹⁴ 'The New Manhood' p. 9

Robert Bly (2001) reports that : “... the English government denied the landless father access to free pasture and common land with the precise aim of forcing him, with or without his family, to travel to the factory.” He goes on to say that : “... by the middle of the 20th century in Europe and North America a massive change had taken place: the father was working, but the son could not see him working.”¹⁵ Bly asserts that : “... we now live in a system of industrial domination, which is not patriarchy. The system we live in gives no honour to the male mode of feeling nor to the female mode of feeling.”¹⁶

The male connection to the land and to supporting their family, tribes and villages was further broken by the first World War (1914 - 1918).

250,000 British under-age boys enlisted to go to war. The authorities turned a blind eye to allow them to join. Men (and women and children) suffered further during ‘The Great Depression’ during the 1930’s where men continued to need to be away from their families in search of work.

World War II (1939 - 1945) brought further pain and suffering and damage to the family and communal structures that had existed for many thousands of years. Boys had to perform the roles of men and many men, if not killed, were severely wounded in all manner of ways.

Where men may need to remain somewhat distant to too many feelings in case they need to protect their tribe, the “man-code” added further weight to “be tough” “wear the pain” “stand tall” “don’t be a sissy” etc. Men were also considered expendable.

Wars and Economic troubles also led to more and more displacement, with many millions of men, women and children having to flee their home countries to survive. So many decades of traumatic shifts left men broken, wounded and damaged, and without the support of the “elders” - men who lived before them. Traditions that were thousands of years old were disrupted or broken. Many men were gone and the boys who were left were expected to carry a man’s load.

¹⁵ ‘Iron John’ p. 96

¹⁶ ‘Iron John’ p. 99

11. Loss of Code

Bill Kauth in 'A Circle of Men' writes of a silent shame that came from fighting such high-tech wars. Men needed to speak about what they had been through but kept it to themselves. Kauth writes that his father's generation : "They were in the first fully automated war ... and "wounded, deep inside." ¹⁷

Kauth suggests that the men lost the "sense of genuine warrior-ship." Like their fathers, they had been removed from doing meaningful work and were made to : "operate cold machines that delivered death miles away or miles below." ¹⁸

Despite the necessity, and all the perfectly understandable reasons for having to fight such an enemy, still they carried a shame. Many had destroyed their enemies without ever seeing that enemy in plain view. For thousands of years the warrior fought against his foe with some form of code, often face to face or in near proximity. World Wars I and II broke that archetypal code.

And the climactic culmination of World War II, saw the dropping of atomic weapons onto thousands of men, women, and children as well as the burning of their villages and destruction of their means of making a living. The end of World War II left the world in a very damaged state.

Kauth suggests that : "our fathers got too close to (the) shadow warrior." ¹⁹ and : "beneath the rationale, beneath the good, solid, logical reasons is the reality that they killed millions of people. ... they did it." ²⁰ and that shame lived on in an unconscious state, affecting how they continued to live their lives.

Robert Bly also writes of his father's generation : "... [their] spirits died in the unconscious shame associated with dishonouring the archetypal warrior. The shame of World War II was secret. They rarely, if ever, talked about their experience of the war. Later they threw

¹⁷ 'A Circle of Men' p. 117

¹⁸ 'A Circle of Men' p. 117

¹⁹ 'A Circle of Men' p. 117

²⁰ 'A Circle of Men' p. 117

themselves into work, bottled spirits, or other addictions to salve the shame. ...”²¹

Robert Bly adds that : “Anything left of the warrior vanished with the mass bombings of Dresden, the bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and the B-52 bombings of rice fields in Vietnam.”²²

Perhaps it is the nature of masculinity that we need to be able to separate from our emotional nature so as to be able to perform roles such as warrior and protectors.

Perhaps it is in the nature of being human that we have to sort out our lower and darker qualities, that we may rise above past wounds and negative power plays. Clearly, we still have a lot to learn and to heal and to re-balance.

12. Void of Masculinity

Bill Kauth writes that after World War II : “... there was a void of male energy in the western world. Authentic male energy was in very short supply. ...”²³ “... Wives went crazy with frustration, living with men who came home to them spiritually dead. They felt powerless to do anything about it. In their desperation, too often, they tried making their sons into the man they were missing ... ”²⁴

Kauth expresses it very well when he writes that : “... Growing up without an emotionally alive father and experiencing the emotional incest with Mom made intimate relationships with both men and women difficult.”²⁵

The aftermath of Industrialisation, the World Wars and Great Depression left an enormous void in the father-son relationship. It also placed great pressures on boys in trying to find emotional, mental and spiritual support from their fathers or other men who had lived through these severe decades. Women were also left, having to support

²¹ 'Iron John' p. 158

²² 'Iron John' p. 158

²³ 'A Circle of Men' p. 117

²⁴ 'A Circle of Men' p. 118

²⁵ 'A Circle of Men' p. 118

themselves and their families with absent or broken men and fatherless boys.

Likely, we are still working through the wounds inflicted during that time and still trying to work out why men lost their traditional strengths. We also do nothing to address a problem unless we have come to the point where we acknowledge that there is a problem at all.

13. Need for Masculine & Feminine Balance

Throughout history we see how men and women have suffered. Men have gone off to war and the women left to tend to the wounded. It is one thing to die and another to live with the aftermath.

It is reported that Vikings held a belief that when they died in battle they would go to Valhalla where they could continue to fight and to die each day and to feast each evening. An interesting view of the afterlife as being a constant battle and satisfying emotional addictions and physical cravings.

The Middle Ages saw the development of Chivalry where Knights were encouraged to develop various virtues including respect for the feminine.

In New Zealand, after bloody battles, the Maori Warriors, were helped by the women who sang to them while they soaked their wounds in hot springs. Wounds that were both physical as well as mental and emotional. The men who had been part of the violence of battles, were supported to heal and reconnect with their own inner feminine side so that they could reintegrate into the community. To soften the wounds of battle and violent behaviour so that they could once again be part of communal living.

When I look at the state of the world I wonder if our troubles are, possibly, a state of imbalance between masculine and feminine qualities. That it is, at least partly, because we men have lost touch with our own inner feminine aspects that we strive towards embodying a “mask” of who we are. That we push too hard to be “masculine” at

the expense of acknowledging our full and whole nature of both masculine and feminine aspects.

Men are sensitive as well as forthright. Women are strong as well as receptive, loving and kind. Men and women both have negative and dark potentials as well as positive. Living a healthy and fulfilled life is more than merely playing a role in the hope that you don't feel too challenged by the complexity of who you are in truth.

The beauty of life is that it will sort us out one way or another. Life has a way of bringing us challenges that have to be faced at some stage in some way. We cannot merely avoid our challenges; if we do, we become reduced in some way.

These days we seem to have the emergence of many more people who are transgender and non-gender. Not only are we still catching up with the fact that we have moved past the image of masculinity as being characters portrayed by the likes of John Wayne, we also need to face the fact that many now identify as being without gender or changing their gender.

In Australia in 2019 we have only recently acknowledged that people of the same sex can have the same legal rights as people of mixed genders. Life is moving faster than people seem willing to accept but it is in acknowledging how things are in actuality, and learning to embrace all ways that we will be able to create peace. Until we learn to respect ourselves and each other we will continue to feed wars as an expression of our own inner, individual states of imbalance.

14. Redressing Our Attitude Towards Women

Robert A Johnson in 'Femininity Lost and Regained' (1991) brings our awareness to how far back our society has considered women to be somehow "less than" men. He writes : "... the sixth century church council at Mâcon (a province in France just north of Lyons) had a long debate on whether women had a soul. When the final count was taken, the decision was affirmative - by one vote!" ²⁶

²⁶ 'Femininity Lost and Regained' p. 46

In his book 'He : understanding masculine psychology' (1989) Johnson writes : "It has been estimated that more than 4 million women were burned at the stake during the height of the counter reformation in Europe." ²⁷ I wonder if this figure excludes those women who were drowned in the rivers, beaten to death, buried alive, garrotted, hanged and raped. Shockingly, men turned their unresolved shadow nature towards destroying the feminine.

History shows us the depths to which we have not yet grown out of attributing blame onto someone else and somehow justify these actions. Women still suffer enormously in many cultures as well as strive to be heard and accepted as equal in the modern western world. Our society and collective mindset still justifies paying women less for the same tasks. Is this not an unconscious drive to make sure that the male maintains power?

From such destruction of women in the Reformation in Europe and many other times throughout history, we all continue to suffer. Until we can find within our individual hearts and minds a respect for all life and for our own inner wholeness, we will not find the greater consciousness to raise our life experience.

Robert Bly wrote that : "19th Century men characteristically failed to notice female suffering." ²⁸ He went on to say that : "In this century, men have added another inattention: they characteristically failed to notice their own suffering." ²⁹

Perhaps it is part of the legacy of shame and unconscious guilt that keeps us from living our lives in a more accepting and aware state.

How able and willing are we to accept when we feel vulnerable and sensitive? How able to allow ourselves to feel and heal? How rigid in our beliefs that life "should be" a certain way when clearly it is more complex than that.

²⁷ 'He' p. 65

²⁸ 'Iron John' p. 73

²⁹ 'Iron John' p. 73

15. Change of Mores

Another thing that challenged men in my youth was the Feminist movement of the 1970's. My whole childhood had been a continuous list of ways of behaviour that I needed to learn and to perform, including how men were meant to treat women. Even at an early age I was near overwhelmed at the amount of rules that I had to know and live by. These came from our British heritage and were called 'manners.'

Manners included opening a door for a woman. Whether it be the door to a car or the door to a building. As a man I should walk on the roadside of any walkway. This rule, I was told, had its roots in Medieval Europe, where people would throw waste from their houses into the street and it was more fitting for the gentleman to be hit by the waste and to protect the lady. The reason was updated so that it still made sense in the modern era. If a car drove past and splashed water and mud into the air, then the man walking next to the roadside would again protect the woman by being the one to be splashed by that mud.

There were also rules about being polite and how a man spoke to women, etc. In England in Victorian times, etiquette decreed that a gentleman would never initiate a conversation with a woman but would wait, politely, until a woman commenced a conversation with him. The conversation could continue until the woman gave indication that it was time for it to end. This practice of course was strangely contrasted by the way the man of the house kept control over the property, the economy, the laws, the businesses, etc etc.

To a child in the 1960's manners were fascinating but also restricting. I felt that so many rules would eventually take away my naturalness and, indeed, restrict me enjoying life with any deep passion. At the same time these rules clashed with the role-models of men perpetrated in Hollywood movies. That a man would be brash and aggressive like John Wayne or cool and unavailable like Steve McQueen or sensitive and brooding like Marlon Brando. Hollywood still pushes simple stereotypes as to what a man is. Present day the individual (man or woman) is hard-done-by and has to resort to violence to "win the day" or "beat the system" etc. These violent role-models are put forward as how to be a hero in an otherwise subservient life.

Many of these rules were suddenly upturned when I went to Teachers College and met women who defined themselves as feminists who were very outspoken at what they believed needed to change. I wonder just how much the Feminist movement in the 1970's confused many older men as to how they expressed themselves and to what was no longer appropriate in language or attitude or action. Perhaps many older men ignored the new ways of thinking and clung to their older, established views.

For a younger man, trying to learn how to be a decent member of society, there was a whole new learning curve as I could get into trouble for opening a door for a woman or find myself dismissed if I was trying to be polite.

Eventually the new way of viewing things went to awakening our whole society. The new ways of seeing male and female roles called for greater respect, and allowing women to be true to themselves. Both men and women had to learn how to free themselves from previous, more restrictive roles and belief systems.

The need for change was obvious but, to a degree, men got left behind as society worked at redressing past ills. Many men became more confused at how they were supposed to behave, or allowed to relate with women. Both men and women were working hard at getting clear on what the new order might be.

For myself, I found it quite a confusing time as I sought to find a partner and disengage from all the other opinions 'out there' and find what was my own way of being. Programmed from childhood, it took many years of experimenting to find out how I could be a decent man as well as my own self in truth.

16. Toxic Masculinity

Come forward into 2019 and we see the "Me Too" movement and challenges to men over being "toxic."

Recently I read that the unofficial response of the military in Australia, to repeated rapes and mistreatment of women, was the sentence "boys will be boys." I wonder just how prevalent are these old ways of

thinking that may have been acceptable in earlier decades but continuing to cause great suffering to those affected by them now.

The “Me Too” movement calls out past and present day abuse of women and serves to stun society into looking at the abuse women have suffered in recent decades. It also includes abuse done to men.

As well as the abuse of women and men, we also learn something of the vast abuse that has been done to children.

Wikipedia defines ‘Toxic Masculinity’ as “adherence to traditional male gender roles that restrict the kinds of emotions allowable for men and boys to express, including social expectations that men seek to be dominant and limit their emotional range primarily to expression of anger.”

Some men are limited in their expression of emotions. Whatever the cause of this, it is high time that we went deeper into ourselves and allow ourselves to feel more. To feel and to ‘hear’ our emotions. To find out just what these emotions are trying to tell us.

Perhaps it is a past wound that has been buried for many years. Perhaps it is an aspect of your childhood that wants to be remembered.

Perhaps loss, perhaps joy. Living without experiencing emotions is a block to the flow of life itself, and is likely one of the ways we block ourselves from health and vitality.

I have noticed that when I limit what I feel then I find myself living more in my head. The head tries to find justification for many of things that, more likely, just need to be felt. As uncomfortable as feelings can be, once they are felt they move through. Once uncomfortable emotions are experienced then better ones flow.

Not feeling the emotions leads to blocks in the flow of wellbeing and it is then that the feelings get “acted out.” We can only suppress a feeling for so long before it comes out in inappropriate ways.

Alan Jenkins in ‘Invitations to Responsibility’ (1997) quotes : “Western industrialised society is characterised by its highly competitive and

hierarchical nature and an ideology of individualism or individual achievement, as opposed to co-operation and inter-dependence”³⁰

Our Western society seems to be based on the individual striving for accomplishment of independence, power and economic security. We have moved away from a collective sharing and protection of the whole tribe. We still provide some degree of support for the poor and less able, but generally we encourage satisfaction of individual needs and cravings.

The hero “gets the girl” or “wins the day” by defeating an imagined enemy. We rarely see examples of how a community work together to ensure that all members have their basic needs met. This scenario is not dramatic enough for our media or economics based on fear and greed.

Jenkins writes : “Individual self-esteem and personal success tend to be based on a lust for status and power and the deification of these concepts. Such a recipe for individual status and success promotes the acquisition of property and of control and influence over others and the environment. ...” He continues :

“... The lust for status and entitlement is often pursued with little regard or responsibility for the impact these strivings have on the welfare of others and the environment. ... the world becomes conceptualised as a place where individuals are either winners or losers, competing in an arena in which ‘might is right’.”³¹

Perhaps ‘Toxic Masculinity’ is partly an expression of the goals we have accepted as being desirable but also show where the individual goals do not necessarily serve the common good - unless we consciously steer them that way.

The man traditionally “brings home the bacon” and “puts food on the table” but often loses himself in working so hard that he neglects or forgets why he is chasing that goal in the first place. Perhaps it is our cultural assumptions about what makes for a "healthy economy" that has become toxic?

³⁰ (Levine 1986; Taubman 1986; Sommers-Flanagan & Walters 1987) Quoted in ‘Invitations to Responsibility’ p. 33

³¹ ‘Invitations to Responsibility’ p. 33

So called “toxic” males likely have little idea that they are behaving in a way that others find offensive. Men rarely sit in conversation with other men where they can speak openly and honestly about their thoughts and feelings and get a true perspective from their peers.

It seems to me that we still cling to old ways of seeing the world and how a man “should” behave. We are comfortable within the habits we have created where we often just share in a narrow play of assumptions about what other men find interesting. Either that or withdraw and not speak out about what feels important to us at all.

It is one thing to be “toxic” and another to refuse to investigate why people might experience certain behaviours that way. The ego finds it too easy to defend itself against change and seeks out others who are in agreement with us. The ego finds it far more comforting to stay the way it is and simply gather around it other men who think the same way. But the world is changing. We are evolving. As our society becomes more emotionally intelligent, we too need to grow and to change.

As a balance to looking at this idea of “toxic” masculinity I would like to briefly refer to how the quality of aggression in men may also serve a society. In our current state of evolution we still have worldwide conflicts and man still goes to war. We still have people who do harm to others; who destroy and inflict pain rather than serve and support. It seems to me that we are not yet evolved enough for men to let go of all of their traditional roles. There is still the need for the honourable warrior who can perform his role of defending his community. Robert Bly in ‘Iron John’ writes of the view of a Russian woman about the value of aggression and men.

“All the young men who were left after the battle for Kiev went to Moscow to defend it. Not one came back. ... I know that women in the United States are angry with the men because they are aggressive, and so on. We don’t feel that way. If the Russian men had not had great aggression in them, the Germans would be in Moscow right now. The matter of aggression looks different if you have been invaded.”³²

As in all things, we need to find the best expression of our human nature. We need to be open to what serves best. What way men can channel their maleness so that it serves the common good and does not do damage?

How can a man channel his inner “fire” to create rather than destroy? To nurture and protect those he loves, as well as himself.

A wounded man may tend to want to express that wounded-ness by hurting others. It is a very brave and honourable man who works with himself to lift his pain and suffering. It takes effort for him to heal himself and thereby regain a positive sense of self and protect the wellbeing of others.

Each of us has that potential within us, for positive as well as for negative. This I believe is the quest and journey of the modern man. To give himself space and time to feel what is within and how best to live a meaningful life.

17. Roles and Expectations

The Jungian psychologist James Hollis writes : “In the process of responding to the socialisation process of childhood and the pressure of outer realities, we become progressively estranged from ourselves.”

33

Progressively distant from who we are in our heart of hearts. In the process of growing up, we give ourselves away. It begins with needing love from parents and forming various alliances at school, to get acceptance from teachers and reasonable treatment in the community where you live. You may be encouraged to “come out of yourself” if you are shy or “quieten down” if you are loud.

Throughout life other people have opinions on how they want you to behave so that they have their own preferences met. Then add to that all of the opinions that other people had on you being or becoming “a man.”

Alan Jenkins in 'Invitations to Responsibility' writes : “Traditional recipes for masculinity which are consistent with the gender division of responsibility and labour, also foster social-emotional avoidance and reliance. ...”³⁴ Jenkins suggests that :

“The traditional role prescribes an avoidance of intimacy, nurturance and relationship responsibilities by the male. He is not required to be emotionally expressive but expected to be calm and cool in any crisis so that he can take the lead, solve problems in a rational way and not let feelings get in the way. ... “³⁵

Jenkins comments on how the gender stereotype : “is in fact a recipe for social and emotional incompetence and total reliance on a female partner for the social and emotional requirements of relationships.”³⁶

A man : “is expected to be tough and competitive. ...”³⁷ “... He must also be guarded and defensive and not make himself vulnerable by taking emotional risks in which he “lays himself open” or “gives himself away. ...”

I have experienced this when I worked in a large post-industrial town of around 100,000 population. I found the men to be defensive and the culture of showing affection generally expressed itself as men picking on each other. When I complemented a man on his work effort he wanted to know what I “wanted” from him. I replied that I was simply complementing him as I appreciated his creativity. Again he was wary and explained to me that it wasn't the culture of that town for men to share openly with other men. I since learned about how many men were sexually abused by members of a various churches and other organisations and how profound an affect that had on those young men and their families and the culture in general.³⁸

The men were not merely stuck in limited roles, they were also deeply abused and wounded from their childhoods and subsequent lack of love and respect for their pain and suffering. The abuse had been covered up for many decades. Before that there had been the abuse

³⁴ 'Invitations to Responsibility' p. 39

³⁵ 'Invitations to Responsibility' p. 39

³⁶ 'Invitations to Responsibility' p. 39

³⁷ 'Invitations to Responsibility' p. 39

³⁸ The town itself also had a history of violence in its foundation during a gold rush.

of the aboriginal people and of emigrants who came to this country in search of a new life.

The culture has experienced so much abuse over so many years that it is only now beginning to address these issues.

Again, these wounds interfere with men's relationships to themselves, other men, women and children. The wounded man needs a lot of love and support to get him through his suffering. It is a long and difficult task to find where he can reclaim some sense of self-love and self-acceptance.

18. What To Do?

The ever increasing complexity of modern day society requires of each of us to go within; to be self-reflecting and to find what can keep us positive and strong. Whatever your circumstances, a man still needs to find within himself a clear sense of who he is and what he stands for.

We each need a sense of meaning and purpose to support us through our earthly travails.

Too many men suffer needlessly when help is available. The journey may not be easy but you can find what does make sense - for you - in this world.

It takes the courage to start. I also think it takes an attitude of being kind to oneself as well. To be kind and to keep going in the direction you feel is in your heart. The mind can help but the heart must be engaged in making worthwhile change.

I work facilitating men's support circles and experience every session just how much we can support each other with whatever pressures us. Healing may be gradual and wounds remain wounds but there is a support that is both loving and kind for each man who is willing to take the chance to help himself and support another.

It does not matter what you have done or has been done to you - the group exists to support each and every man who is willing to be present - with respect for himself and the others.

Other foci include : to be harmless, take personal responsibility for yourself in asking for help and sharing what you want support with. The Circles are simple in that we just sit together in a circle format.

The Group can be an incredible support by simply giving you the space to speak your heart and mind and, as able, be present to support other men by listening to and hearing their stories. There is no expectation for you to even speak. You can just be present and experience how the group sharing affects you.

In their brilliant book on four basic archetypes, 'King, Warrior, Magician, Lover', Moore & Gillette offer : "In his fear of living, he also cannot participate in the joy and pleasure that other people experience in their lived lives. If he is withholding from others, and not sharing what he knows, he eventually feels isolated and lonely."³⁹

You can read more on how I facilitate Work Circles and Men's Groups on my website www.innerwork4men.com

19. Economic Rationalism

I'm not sure where it all started but the term 'Economic Rationalism' concerns me. I see how being rational has created some very valuable technologies that serve humanity so well. I also see how being 'rational' about economics is only part of the equation. If we only apply reason to our economics then we can be in danger of forgetting to be humane. This, in my opinion, is what is occurring.

To think in a rational way is, to my understanding, to do our thinking from the left side of the brain. To think without including intuition and heart is to lose touch with what is most important in life. To view life in an holistic way rather than limiting our view to left brain only.

A healthy economy serves the collective good in many ways but economic rationalism seems to put money ahead of human well-

³⁹ 'King, Warrior, Magician, Lover' p. 114

being. If we think without including our heart, then we are in danger of being back where we started, treating others as slaves.

Where it makes perfect economic 'sense' to get products and services more cheaply - by employing someone who will work for less - in the end - this way of thinking will likely diminish us all. We all end up working for less. We look to what we can get for less - rather than consider the whole picture that "we are all in this together."

Our focus remains a stressed : "how do I survive?" rather than a more embracing : "what works for the good of all?" We have lost the better aspects of our traditional tribal cultures.

Steve Biddulph expresses something of where we lost our way : "People earned more, but spent more, often on non-essential consumer goods. We shifted from involvement satisfactions to consumption satisfactions. We didn't want to be free, we wanted to be wealthy." ⁴⁰

We became wealthy and we became content. Then we became more craving and forgot what we valued most. Perhaps we got hypnotised by what we were creating and forgot just why we were creating it. This will be different for every man but in expressing the more narrow potentials of our masculinity perhaps we lost something of the wholeness of life.

A society needs to respect both the masculine aspects as well as the feminine aspects. How can we hope for a fulfilled life until we respect all. When we see the need for courage and strength - for action and dependability - for commitment and for inventiveness - and for sensitivity and generosity - for kindness and love - and tenderness and softness - for quietude and caring - and for concern for others as well as for oneself.

Again, in Men's Groups, I find that all of these qualities are a natural flow of men being true to themselves, in just being with other men. In Men's Groups we simply be and find out who we are in truth.

20. Psychological

As I suggested earlier, in childhood we gave ourselves away to get our needs met.

Terrence Real in 'I Don't Want To Talk About It' writes : "Studies indicate that from the moment of birth, boys are spoken to less than girls, comforted less, nurtured less." he suggests that : "Passive trauma in boys is rarely extreme; it is however, pervasive." ⁴¹

It has been estimated that we receive 15,000 to 25,000 hours of being told other people's beliefs before you even get to have your own first thought.

You live in an idea of "who you think you are" and "who you are in truth" is far more deeper than that.

Certainly you have far more potential than what you generally believe you have.

Many psychologists suggest that more than 90% of our decisions come directly from the unconscious. That is, unless you make conscious your decisions, then you are likely running on autopilot and will continue to get the same results and experiences that you always have.

21. Who You Think You Are

The thoughts that you hold come from what you have been told to believe as well as from what seemed true and right for you as you developed. Those thoughts that you hold to be important and true for you become who you "think you are." They are your values and principles and the foundation for how life makes sense.

For many those beliefs remain unexamined as we go along in life. We add more beliefs and defend what we believe to be true. Some of these beliefs may no longer even serve our highest good.

Beliefs that may well have protected you during your vulnerable years of childhood may no longer support you in what you seek to create

now. For example the childhood mantra “never talk to strangers” protects you when you are young but limits you when you are older. A set of beliefs that may be highly helpful as you learn to make your way in the world as a child, may keep away opportunities for you now.

Another way that unconscious thinking and beliefs may limit you is when you simply defend a way of thinking without examining it - just because you have always believed it to be true - or because you perceive the need to defend “your” self. Life gets centred around protecting the ego nature where ego is but one part of who you are in full truth.

The thoughts you cling to become the world you create. You draw to you people and situations that in turn “prove” to you that you are right. “See! Life never works out for me!”

If you have been hurt and formed a belief that the world is dangerous or lonely or whatever, and “people are not to be trusted” - those thoughts necessarily keep people at a distance and you in greater isolation. We tend to create our inner-world by the beliefs we hold, but can also change our experience by letting go of some thoughts and adopting new ones.

The ego-mind that is formed by what we believe in, may defend its existence tenaciously. For all it knows, it is the only thing that exists and treats other peoples views as dangerous to its own. The ego remains feeling isolated by its choices to “protect” itself. It may also crave specific behaviours from other people.

Some men get lost in trying to make their partners behave in a way where they can feel secure, that the world around them remains in their control. Others give away their power so that they might be “looked after” and get what they want that way. Women can do this as well. It is the ego that craves such control so that it does not have to stretch and grow. Sadly, this way simply creates more suffering for a person as life will not allow itself to be so contained.

The Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung suggested that we develop more awareness as to how our ego has been allowed centre stage. To gradually put it aside so we can create a more individuated life of our

own conscious choosing. The ego is still cared for and part of who we are but it is no longer allowed to run the whole show.

Family Programming has a large influence on our behaviour. When young, we need to make sure that we are loved, accepted, supported, protected, etc and likely make compromises to do whatever the significant others want from us. This has to shift as we become more adult.

22. Persona

In youth a boy is well nurtured by his mother and supported by his father. In adolescence he needs a role-model so that he can see what he might aspire to become. The boy needs to grow into being a man (into who he is in greater truth) so he needs to get some idea of what that man might look like. What will he believe in? What values will he hold? What pursuits will he chase and conquer? What battles must he fight? What mountains to climb?

Part of this process of finding a role-model often includes being influenced by popular culture. The boy or young man looks to sporting heroes, or adventures, or men he meets at work or sees in the movies. The developing man takes on various personas to see which one fits. By nature these masks can only be two-dimensional as the boy only sees the basic expressions of his "hero".

His sporting hero might be able to play better than other players but the rest of who that man is, remains but in the imagination of the boy. Likely he tries to emulate some characteristics of one hero and other aspects from another. In the end these are only ideas that the boy takes on but over time, without more deep contact and guidance from older men, the boy may stick to this persona / characterisation he has adopted and how he expresses himself in the world.

He may get acceptance by playing the clown, or trying out for the alfa male. It may suit him to be a follower or realise that he needs to lead. This is a time for trying out what might serve the next stage of his development.

I have met young men who struggled to be honest about their sexuality and went through all kinds of pain in not letting others know.

I have also seen where these young men couldn't find acceptance from those around them. Keeping their truth from others they may

even suffer more. Thankfully our western society develops more quickly these days and people of different sexuality find greater love and support within the general community.

23. Socialisation

On top of masks and personas there are the various roles we were told to play. Roles for approval and survival and roles for income. Roles can give a man a healthy sense of who he is and the acceptance he receives but they can also become something we hide behind so that we can remain private and unchallenged.

I do not envy the men I meet who do not have the confidence to just be themselves. I also struggle with this at times. Thankfully I live in a community that accepts and celebrates people for who they are.

Social Programming has an effect on men. How many times have you heard the sentences "men should be tough" and "boys don't cry." Expectations of how you "should" be as a boy and young man. Until you acquire enough life experience to make the choice, to be yourself, and let go of other peoples expectations.

24. Self-Caring

How well do you care for yourself? How much are you aware of how your environment supports and cares for you? Does your peer group treat you well or poorly? What is in your heart that you are not finding in your present environment? Are you inspired enough or fed-up enough to make a change?

One of the main things I think that is needed these days is to look at how your life is going and what patterns seem to continuously repeat. The task being to identify just how you would prefer to live.

To take enough time-out to allow yourself to feel what is within you and what hopes and dreams live there. To take care of the "child"

within you, like you were parenting yourself. To be loving and kind and sensitive to what is going on within you.

What aspects of yourself need extra attention or more loving-kindness?

To take yourself into nature or approach people who you think might be able to help. To ask yourself questions such as “What can I do for

myself that will help me to heal or to better my experience of life?” “What is of most importance to me right now?” “How might I improve my life experience?” “How can I be of service to others?” “What is truly in my heart of hearts?”

For myself I think that I am learning to look out for where I allow fear to limit my life. How to make decisions and take action to do things differently. To accept challenges to learn and to grow. To open to the idea that I need to better learn to love myself and share that love with others.

25. Mid-Life

At midlife we are called to go within.

It is only by becoming more psychologically conscious that we can become better able to respond to life’s many challenges and changes. By mid-life we need to consider reclaiming our life from its previous programming and compromises. We need to create the life we want - using conscious choice.

If you hear yourself saying things like “that’s just the way it is” then you may well be limiting yourself to thoughts you have heard other people say in your formative years. Until we create our own vision for what we want to create, we are at the mercy of our unconscious.

There are several excellent books on being male at mid-life. Two I enjoyed and can recommend highly are : ‘Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis’ by Peter O’Connor and ‘The Middle Passage’ by James Hollis.

By mid-life we begin to experience how we have sacrificed our inner-world sanctuary for outer-world success. We have allowed ourselves

to become distracted by outer world pleasures, power, accomplishment of goals and acquisition of things. At mid-life the inner-world begins to stir and call us to different things. We become confronted by needing to question ourselves as to what is most important in life - now.

The things we have chased distract and separate us from our relationship to ourselves. Peter O'Connor in 'Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis' (1981) defines the midlife crisis as : "a period in a man's life ... during which he finds himself caught in an inevitable review of his situation. It is a time of self-assessment."⁴² A time when men begin to face : "the reality of one's mortality." He also adds : "... and the tendency is to deny the ageing process."⁴³

We are confronted by our own mortality and challenged to let go of what worked in the past. We are invited to change; to open to new growth and deeper ways of living.

A natural conflict exists between what worked in the past and what new ways of being are called for in moving forward. O'Conner suggests that his experience of the men he worked with, carried an anxiety because of their inability to : "recognise that these opposites are continually dancing within, and that outer conflicts are often simply the externalisation of the inner play."⁴⁴

James Hollis (2006) questions : "How many wars are generated by the power of what we will not face in ourselves? And who among us is strong enough, or ethical enough, to say that we are our own problem?"⁴⁵

I have noticed within myself that when life challenges me, there is a natural tendency to look for someone or something else to blame. It is easier to place the problem at someone else's feet than to look within at what I might need to change within me. To "own" that it is my inner-state that is experiencing difficulty. It is me who has to take responsibility (response-ability) for what I choose next.

These days when I catch myself wanting to place blame, I look more deeply at what is going on and what I can do about it. What actions

⁴² 'Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis' p. 37

⁴³ 'Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis' p. 37

⁴⁴ 'Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis' p. 12

⁴⁵ 'Finding Meaning in the 2nd Half of Life' p. 82

do I need to take to move forward? What can I do to change what isn't working in my life?

When I don't do this, and allow myself to blame, then I simply give away my power, that I could be using to create the life that I do want.

O'Conner writes : "So long as we see all the faults as a being outside ourselves, then we simply do not consciously feel any compulsion to do anything about them." ⁴⁶

O'Conner suggests that it is our failure to reflect that is the problem. Our : "failure to pause and listen to the inner world, that renders a man highly vulnerable to the external stresses and tensions, since he is literally outside himself, exposed and frightened." ⁴⁷

We end up living in fear because we fail to open ourselves to what is now moving from within. We continue to try to stay outside of ourselves in what worked in the past but life has bigger plans for us. We do well to stop and reflect and feel what is calling to us.

Peter O'Conner suggests that we free ourselves by seeing what we have been "projecting" onto others and reclaim these projections into knowing who we are. For instance, we project the inner feminine aspects of our being onto women.

We become attracted to women who seem to "carry" our ideals of what is attractive. This ideal is possibly a projection of our own inner feminine nature. That is, who you are inside of you, that you see in another. (It might also just be that your soul knows that the other person is a perfect mate).

We may project our own inner strengths onto a sports or movie star. We see in others, aspects of ourselves that we have not yet owned as part of who we are in whole. We project onto others until we are ready to claim these aspects as parts of ourself.

Midlife is an opportunity to come back to oneself. Sadly many men find this task too difficult and struggle with it. We often minimise ourself and our positive potential by withdrawing from the gifts waiting

⁴⁶ 'Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis' p. 114

⁴⁷ 'Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis' p. 120

for us. Gifts we may find in self-reflection and acceptance of our whole being.

We have been taught that some aspects of ourself are “wrong” or not desirable. We place these aspects away somewhere and in mid-life we get to choose again.

Robert A. Johnson & Jerry Ruhl in 'Contentment: a way to true happiness' (2000) write :

“Contentment can be found only in the middle place, the point where you are neither inflated nor deflated. It requires that you be who you are, no more and no less.”⁴⁸

We often lose this state of contentment through thinking that we need more, or want more, or want to fear less, etc, etc, etc. It takes practice to find out where contentment and joy are for you.

26. Inner Balance

At a psychological level, a very important aspect of how we find wholeness lies in keeping balance; especially balance between the masculine and the feminine aspects of our being.

Johnson suggests that :“The loss of feminine energy for a man ... is the source of much of his discontent, loneliness, sense of meaninglessness, and moodiness.”⁴⁹

“The loss or damage of inner feminine qualities affects our emotional well-being, directly modifying our happiness and contentment.” Johnson recommends : “If the feminine qualities are in good order, a person will feel safe and secure.”⁵⁰

We crave many things in the expectation that an acquisition of such will bring us happiness. In truth, the pursuit of such distractions is often disguising our search for meaning and purpose in life.

⁴⁸ 'Contentment : a way to true happiness' p. 49

⁴⁹ 'Femininity Lost and Regained' p. 1

⁵⁰ 'Femininity Lost and Regained' p. 2

In 'Femininity Lost and Regained', (1991) Johnson writes : "Though we have begun to restore woman's place in our modern world, we have not done nearly enough in restoring the feminine - the values of feeling, peace, contentment, and perspective."⁵¹

In achieving outer developments we may well have lost connection with more inner ones. Feeling, compassion, sensitivity, kindness ... all become somewhat less revered in comparison to gaining more money, power, security, etc.

To a degree, we trade in our more feminine qualities for more masculine endeavours. Both serve us well when we manage to find a balance between the two.

I find that it is not simply a matter of theory. Ideas are one thing and practice is another. Being human as well as male means that there are complexities to be worked with and worked through. Most of the time I content myself, that I do my best, to rest in the better aspects of my being. I can only do my best and forgive myself when I miss that target. Again I am reminded, that each of us is a work-in-progress.

27. Anima / Animus

Peter O'Connor warns : "the extent that a man has developed the outer aspects of himself, to that extent his inner world very often lies underdeveloped."⁵²

Johnson in 'He' (1989) refers to a man's inner feminine nature - defined by C. G. Jung as a man's "Anima." Johnson writes : "She-who-will-inspire" and "the animating principle of life" ... "she who animates and is the fountain of life in the heart of a man."⁵³

For a man to be truly whole, he needs to open to his full nature which includes both masculine and feminine qualities. He also needs to move from languishing in a 'boy psychology' and awaken to the more mature aspects of masculinity.

⁵¹ 'Femininity Lost and Regained' p. 13

⁵² 'Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis' p. 101

⁵³ 'He' p. 29

From out of all potentials, both negative and positive, juvenile and developed; to create something of value and character to live by. To make the best of his positive potentials and to keep in balance the negative and darker aspects of his being.

Being human and being male necessitates a creative endeavour - to bring together all that he is - into all that he can be.

What does it mean to “be a man”? What does it mean to you to “be a good man”?

I have met many men who inspire me to find this out for myself.

SOME HEALING PATHWAYS

28. Spirituality

I am more than aware that many people baulk at the term “spiritual” and shy away from even considering what it might mean. When I think of what it means to be spiritual I think of “what I am” that is more than simply an ego and its accompanying fears. Simply put, the spiritual part of us is that aspect that is beyond the body, some unwanted feelings, and a busy mind. We also have a soul and Spirit.

The ex-Harvard professor Richard Alpert, also known as Ram Dass, became a spiritual teacher to many and gave us the delightful idea : “the ego strives but never arrives, whereas spirit is peace.”

Spirit is the eternal aspect of what we are. Ego is that temporary aspect of mind that thinks it is what we are in total. We are clearly so much more than that.

It may take almost an entire lifetime until we get to when we are willing to think about what positive potentials there may be for us in being a man. We also have the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be spiritual as well.

As far as I have come to, a daily practice of sitting quietly and going within, puts me in contact with the spiritual part of my being. I get to feel that, deeper, inner aspect of who and what I am. A sense of quietude and peace as well as the busyness of a searching mind.

At times, when I sit quietly enough, I get to experience going beyond the lower mental-chatter, and experience what lies beyond that level of being. I get in contact with that part of me that is more refined and more connected to the greater life.

I see the Spiritual Path as a chance to choose to experience more of who and what I am. In seeking a higher perspective of life, I value and enjoy life more, as well as grow from that. I often find life to be difficult but I also find that a broader view of things gives me help to find my way through the challenges.

My latest lesson, at time of writing, is to open to my full spirituality no matter how much that challenges other people. To maintain my love for them but also, out of love, to acknowledge and respect my own self. "To thine self be true."

To a degree I have never been understood by many who have been closest to me, and at times, I did choose to limit my own expression to challenge them less. I am very slowly learning that I cannot take away another person's lessons or pain but must simply bless them on their own way. To accept that they have their own lessons to learn. It is difficult enough for me to learn my own lessons without getting involved in other people's as well.

I slowly learn that it is not healthy for me to limit my own truth in the hope that it somehow helps another. I can be as understanding as I am able but I am also quite rusty when it comes to being true and honour my own inner calling.

I am also beginning to see why many men do not talk or share their thoughts and feelings. When you do so, other people can take advantage of that and use it against you. They may not intend to do so, but human nature being what it is ...

Even if people protest that life "should" be another way, it is up to me to be true to myself. Within that truth I seek to be loving and kind.

We each have our own path to walk, and cannot walk another's for them. We each have our own path to walk, and not walking it is no longer an option.

29. Inner Work

Robert A. Johnson relayed a story about C.G. Jung who once observed; "what are you to do if you are pursued by a lion in your dream?" Jung suggested that what pursues you in your dreams represents an aspect of yourself that you exclude in daily life. A part of you that you generally push away or deny, repress, etc. Jung suggested that the thing to do was to "turn around" and say to the lion : "Please, will you be so kind as to eat me?"

At this point the excluded element, in this case the lion, will reply that it is an "emissary of God" and asks "why you have made it so hard for (me) to bring the gift of God?" 54

There are so many aspects of our whole being that we push away for various reasons. Our dreams work at balancing these elements and showing us in symbolic terms what we might open to next, as we grow into our fullness and wholeness.

James Hollis suggests that the : "chief disorders of our time are the fear of loneliness and the fear of growing up." Hollis suggests that our flight from loneliness : "drives people to mill amid malls, to stay in bad relationships, to abuse substances and worst of all, to avoid a relationship with the self." 55

Hollis questions us as to how we might : "ever have a good relationship with another when we cannot have a good relationship with ourselves?" 56 This is certainly the inner-work each of us has to do in the second half of life.

In my opinion it is wise to be aware that we each have a Higher Self as well as the mundane day-to-day aspect of who we think we are. We also have vast unknown aspects that are hidden, to which Jung

54 'Femininity Lost and Regained' p. 78

55 'Finding Meaning in the 2nd Half of Life' p. 122

56 'Finding Meaning in the 2nd Half of Life' p. 122

referred to as the “Shadow nature.” Each of us has so many unknown aspects including some that are vulnerable and needing our attention, including an “Inner Child.”

To live a full life it is important for us to find connection with our “true self.”⁵⁷

As mentioned earlier, being human has many qualities and energies that we have to work through. Virtues as well as vices. We also have archetypal energies, both positive and negative, that can create havoc or support us. These include the King, Warrior, Magician and Lover. The archetypes are energies that exist in the collective psyche and can be called upon for inner support.

If you are feeling excessively vulnerable then perhaps you can seek out your inner-warrior archetype. Just remember that each archetype is potentially positive or negative so navigate wisely.

Robert Bly in Iron John writes : “... the quality of a true warrior is that he is in service to a purpose greater than himself: that is, to a transcendent cause. Mythologically, he is in service to a True King.”⁵⁸

Moore & Gillette (1991)⁵⁹ write : ‘... the King was the earthly conduit from the Divine World - the world of the King energy - to this world. He was the mediator between the mortal and the divine. He was the central artery ... that allows the blood of the life-force to flow into the human world.’

We seek these qualities within ourselves to support us in growing into more mature masculinity. Masculinity that serves the good of all rather than simply appease a craving ego.

We each have the qualities within us of courage, strength, trust, faith, generosity, benevolence, etc. These qualities, also called virtues, can give you the help you need at any specific stage in your life. They may not be easy to access but they are within you.

You may also find these qualities in friends or in getting professional help.

⁵⁷ This might also be called ‘becoming whole’, ‘original nature’ or ‘divine self’ etc

⁵⁸ ‘Iron John’ p. 152

⁵⁹ ‘King, Warrior, Magician, Lover’ p. 60

This morning I woke to see the image of a circle. As I came again into daily consciousness, I became aware that the message I was receiving was that : “life follows from where you focus. You create life from what you choose.” The answer to every question is within.

30. Men’s Support Circles

I am fortunate to have great support from my beloved wife, loving family and dear friends. I also get support from attending and facilitating Men’s Groups. Within the Men’s Groups I get the opportunity to speak my mind and be heard. I also get to hear other men’s stories and learn from each and every one of them.

In Men’s Group we meet and sit in a Circle. I ask the men : “What is most important to you today?” and encourage all to find where they feel safe, and what feels ready in them, to share. We practice Being Present to ourselves and each other (‘Being present’ itself an act of love). In being present we “hold space” for each other. Any topic can be discussed Openly and Honestly * ⁶⁰

Over time we become a group of men who learn to Care and Communicate and Feel who we are in greater truth than our usual day-to-day lives; taking the gifts we receive in meeting together into our broader life.

In Circle, we take time out to relax and just hang out together. Such a simple action of meeting together in a Circle can have a profound effect on each man.

There seems to be a lot of Healing in the practice of just being honest and present and enjoying good company in a Safe and Supportive Group environment.

M. Scott Peck in his book ‘The Different Drum’ (1988) writes : “Community is a safe place precisely because no one is attempting to heal or convert you, to fix you, to change you.” Peck encourages members of community to : “accept you as you are” and create a space where each person is : “free to be you.” ... “And being so free,

⁶⁰ * Except planning to do violence to self or others

you are free to discard defences, masks, disguises: free to seek your own psychological and spiritual health.” 61

This is what I aim to create in facilitating Men’s Groups. A place that is safe and supportive, where each man gets to speak about whatever is most important to him on any given day.

We work as a group to provide each other the space to speak from our heart; to be listened to, and hear, each other; and to take responsibility for ourselves in creating the life we do want.

Despite whatever wounds you may carry from the past, you get the opportunity to be in the present and to explore what you would prefer in going forward.

I live in the belief that life is waiting for us to open to how it can be better. To be ready to receive what we have been hoping for.

It is up to each of us to learn how to better trust life and open to it.

A better life is possible.

31. One Man’s Dreaming (a personal enquiry)

While acknowledging that life, despite its many challenges, is indeed a great blessing. And very aware that I have everything I need to enjoy a good life. I look at the state of the world and wonder when we might, collectively, “man up” and help to create some needed change. To be our best self and stand for principles that serve the good-of-all.

Many men I meet are admirable and give of themselves in many and varied ways. Others seem lost in chasing ambitions based on deep and unconscious fears. Many men give quietly and profoundly just by being true to themselves with a natural generosity of spirit.

After writing this review and wondering if it will ever be of any help to anyone else, I ask myself some serious questions. Questions that might help me to find my way in life :

“What are the most important aspects of life?”

“Am I learning what love is, in higher truth?” and

“What exactly is in my heart?”

I will now wait patiently until the part of me that knows the answers to these questions, speaks loudly enough for me to hear.

Some of the ideas that began to flow from my questions include :

To be grateful for all that I am given and receive.

To acknowledge that life is precious.

To love people to the best of my ability.

To meditate and open to inner reality.

To sit quietly, often enough, and seek inspiration and inner guidance.

To do my best to be loving and kind to all - including myself.

The list expands ...

as I allow myself to dream.

Wishing you all the very best on your journey.

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Greg Govinda (aka Arjuna Govinda) is an educator, healer, life coach, researcher, publisher and writer, whose main work for the past three decades has been in publishing books and articles on Spiritual Psychology and facilitating workshops on Holistic Health and Wellbeing.

Greg has been active in travelling with friends, sharing his music, journeying many times to Denmark, Iceland, Norway and around Australia. His travels also include Nepal, Vietnam, U.S.A., Canada, New Zealand, Italy, Austria, France, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and a pilgrimage to La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.

For the past five years his main focus has been on researching and developing Men's Support and Growth Groups.

Other titles by Greg (Arjuna) Govinda

'Heartbeat' CD ~ 2014

'Towards the Lion' ~ (story told as memoir) 2015

'After the Storm : embracing a transformative life' ~ (free writing) 2018

'Constant Change, Endless Love' ~ (life, death and immortality) 2020

'Being Male : seeking peace' ~ eBook 2019, updated in booklet form 2021

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