

MEDIA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Massimilla Harris, Ph.D. and Bud Harris, Ph.D.

Authors of *Into the Heart of the Feminine:*

An Archetypal Journey to Renew Strength, Love, and Creativity

www.budharris.com

Your book delivers new perspectives on what it means to be a woman or a man and it helps us move to more illuminated levels of consciousness and wholeness. But what is this wound to the feminine that you speak of?

In spite of the power that feminism has achieved, we still have a basic wound to the archetypal feminine which means the feminine that is a cornerstone in our nature, our personalities and our culture that has been worsening for a long time. In its most basic form, this is a wound to our heart, a wound that keeps us personally and collectively from living by the values of our heart. In reality, we have been so indoctrinated by our way of life that we actually have more trouble than we realize even trying to figure out the values of our hearts.

You speak of this wound that you call the “Death Mother.” Can you say more about what this term means?

Yes. The Death Mother is a classic term in mythology, developed in modern times by the Jungian analyst and author Marion Woodman. The Death Mother represents the opposite of the good mother. Marion Woodman describes the Death Mother as a “cold, fierce, violent and corrosive power that is rampant in our society.” When an archetypal force or energy is wounded and repressed personally and culturally, it is shoved into the unconscious where its energy and power begins turning negative. The Death Mother then is a metaphor for the destructive nature of our culture that saps the life, spirit, and resilience out of us. She is a force that paralyzes us emotionally and draws the values and possibilities for love from our lives, often without our even realizing it.

MEDIA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS -----page two

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People talk about the current perspective on feminism and say that it also includes men and their emerging awareness of the importance of honoring the feminine. Is this a book that can help get an understanding of this?

It certainly is, and on at least two levels. To begin with, men, especially by mid-life, are joining women in feeling trapped in their lives, frustrated, diminished and untrue to their deepest selves. Men, too, want to find their voices and values and to be understood on a personal level. It is only by healing this wound to the feminine and developing this part of ourselves that men can discover the love and vitality that comes from wholeness as well as the true purposes and meanings in their lives. Dr. Jung was clear that part of a man's nature is also feminine. Jung called this, a man's anima, and if a man cultivates his anima, she "animates" his life and connects him to his deepest self.

You mentioned Carl Jung. Why is understanding of "the human" relevant for us today?

Well, there are many reasons, so let us mention a few of them. To begin with, Jung noticed the archetypal structure of human nature. In this structure, we find both the archetypal feminine and the archetypal masculine as foundation stones in both men and women. We explain this more fully in the book. Jung also thought that for a fulfilling life, we had to pursue wholeness in our personalities. That is, to become aware of the different aspects of ourselves and to include them in the picture of how we live and experience life. He also thought that our wounds are calling us to heal them. In his view, healing and growth go together. So as we heal, we grow beyond our wounds and strengthen and broaden ourselves and our capacities for life.

MEDIA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS -----page three

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People talk about letting “bygones be bygones” or “putting it behind me and getting on with my life.” Why is it important to access one’s deep experiences of childhood and other phases of one’s life?

William Faulkner once said something like, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” He is right. The past determines who we are, how we experience life today, and how we react to current events. We must go back into our pasts to heal our wounds, reclaim parts of ourselves we left behind, and learn how to engage in life with cultivated emotions, matters of heart, and imagination. What we learned and how we were conditioned limit us and in some cases, even torture us. These journeys into our past are to nurture ourselves and to open us to a larger future.

Jungians seem to frequently use myths to illustrate “archetypal” journeys. Can you tell us more about what an archetypal journey is and what prompted you to choose the classic Greek myth of Medusa?

Yes. As we mentioned, an archetype is a metaphor for one of the basic natural energy forces in our psyche, and an archetypal journey is the path that energy takes under certain circumstances. For example, imagine that Medusa is a picture of vibrant, lovely feminine energy, as she is when the myth begins. Then, she is raped and violently treated by the patriarchal images in the story. We see her at the beginning of the story, the horrible treatment she receives in the middle of the story and how, by the end of the story, she has become furious, cold, and destructive. We can see in story form what has happened to our feminine nature and how drastically this enraged metaphor can picture a part of ourselves.

MEDIA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS -----page four

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As the myth develops, Perseus enters the picture. It seems that he has to grow, change and stretch in a very transformative way to meet the tasks that confronted him. Is this a metaphor for addressing our own challenges and calls for transformation?

Yes, it is. Perseus enters the story as a new potential. As we begin to face our wounds and our true reality, new potentials arise within us. We must pay attention to and cultivate these potentials. Perseus becomes a model for us, which we explain in the book and give examples of, for growing and transforming our lives. Ultimately, Perseus encounters Medusa, and as he kills her, the whole situation is transformed, and from her comes new life energy and healing. We carefully explain in the book and give examples of how we can personally cultivate the strength of Perseus within us, and how we can transform even our most serious wounds into the foundation for a bigger, new life.

You seem to like to share stories and fairy tales in the book. Why do you take this approach?

To begin with, it is a much more feminine approach to transforming our lives than the rational, short-term, goal-oriented, surface approach to changing our lives that we actually consider the product of patriarchy. Stories and fairy tales invite us to become engaged in them, to have our hearts moved by them, to open our imagination as well as our hearts. We become participants, not observers. We are no longer just problem-solvers or people trained to answer multiple-choice questions. At first this transition to a more feminine, a more engaged, approach may be troublesome to some of us. But the journey becomes enlarging and strengthening in itself.

MEDIA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS -----page five

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Why is it so difficult for people to learn how to take the inner journey and to find “renewed strength” for these times in the stories that reflect the deepest patterns in our nature?

Well, we believe that we are all brought up in a culture that teaches us to find quick relief from any fear or discomfort, rather than looking for a deeper experience of life and emotions. In addition, we are indoctrinated into certain mind-sets that define what makes up a good life and a successful person. Both of us worked hard, achieved what appeared to be good lives. But under the surface of these lives, we felt unhappy, restless, that we weren't living our real lives. These things forced us to begin looking enough to go to Zurich to study. That is where we began to realize something very basic to our natures, to life, to love – the feminine – was being lost. We had to face this loss in ourselves before we could begin our work to bring it back to life.

Going forward, what are some of the steps or practices, one can do to strengthen oneself in order to be open to new possibilities?

Of course, we must answer this question by saying to carefully read this book. As we read and think about possibilities, we must remember the feminine approach is needed to make our inner work a matter of heart, to cultivate our imagination and our enjoyment in the work, rather than make it a goal-oriented task. The book is meant to carry us beyond gender roles and into the heart of the feminine. The Jungian approach is to always grow beyond our problems and difficulties. This book and this work is oriented toward transformation, hope and a greater sense of feeling at home in ourselves and life. This book has been a labor of love for us and we hope that it helps others strengthen and rekindle the voice of the feminine within themselves and transform their fate with love.