

**“Masculine and Feminine Psychology”**  
**March 18, 2007**  
**Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**  
**Bruce A. Bode**

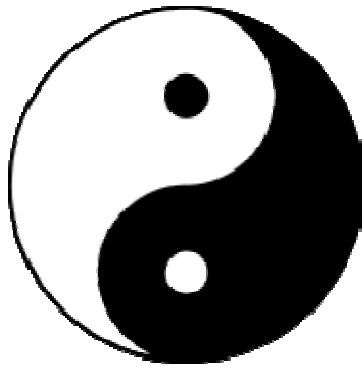
**Call to Worship**

This day is a new day that has been given to us.  
Let us then rejoice in it and be glad.  
And let us count our many, many blessings:  
Let us be grateful for the incredible gift of life,  
And for the capacity to see, to feel, to hear, and to understand.  
Let us be grateful for this time of fellowship, for work to do, and service to render.  
And let us then be especially grateful for the ties of love which bind us together,  
giving dignity, meaning, worth, and joy to all our days.

**Lighting the Chalice (in unison)**

We are travelers. We meet for a moment in this sacred place to love, to share, to serve. Let us use compassion, curiosity, reverence, and respect while seeking our truths. In this way we will support a just and joyful community, and this moment shall endure.

**Responsive Reading**



On the back of the insert in the Order of Service this morning you will see three different versions of the T'ai Chi disk, a Taoist symbol of *yin-yang* that relates to this morning's Responsive Reading. Note that within the light part of each circle, the Yang, there is a small circle of dark, the Yin; and within the dark Yin part there is a small circle of Yang light. This indicates a relationship of connection and movement between the two aspects.

MINISTER: The Chinese image of the Tao as the interplay of Yang and Yin has endured for centuries as a symbol of a deep and abiding insight into the nature of life.

CONGREGATION: The Yang is the light of day. The Yin is the dark of night. Yang is summer; Yin is winter.

MINISTER: The Yang is the joy of life. The Yin is the sorrow of life. Yang is pleasure; Yin is pain.

CONGREGATION: The Yang is all that is out-going and active. The Yin all that is returning and at rest. Yang is high-strung; Yin is low-keyed.

MINISTER: The Yang is the blossoming flower of spring. The Yin is the fading leaf of autumn. Yang is being born. Yin is dying.

CONGREGATION: The Yang is hard like rock. The Yin is soft like water. Yang is standing firm; Yin is yielding.

MINISTER: The Yang is concerned with facts, science, logic. The Yin is concerned with theory, art, intuition. Yang is thinking; Yin is valuing.

CONGREGATION: The Yang is the intelligence of the mind. The Yin is the wisdom of the body. Yang is culture; Yin is nature.

MINISTER: The Yang and the Yin know each other and take their meaning from each other. Yang is defined by Yin; Yin is defined by Yang.

CONGREGATION: The Yang and the Yin stir within each other and flow into each other. Yang contains the seed of Yin; Yin contains the seed of Yang.

ALL: The Yang and the Yin are the pairs of opposites through which we experience the whole of life.

## **Reading**

My reading this morning is from the first chapter of Robert A. Johnson's book, Femininity Lost and Regained, a chapter titled, "The Current Issue."

The loss of feminine qualities and energy is an urgent psychological issue in modern society. It is a painful concern in the emotional lives of both men and women. This loss of something so essential for a woman forces her to question her femininity. It crystallizes the long historic debate about the position of women in society.

The loss of feminine energy for a man is less obvious, but it curtails the emotional depths of his personality and is the source of much of his discontent, loneliness, sense of meaninglessness, and moodiness. It is a shock for a man to discover that his moods and much of his feeling nature are feminine! To be overtaken by a mood is to be overwhelmed by the inner feminine aspect of his character, and it is only by understanding and embracing this femininity that he can clearly understand his masculine nature....

In understanding that femininity is not the prerogative of the female, our first task is to school ourselves to think of it as an entity that affects a woman's central feminine identity and affects a man's ability and capacity for feeling and valuing.

It would be easier to understand this vital dimension if our language were not so sexist and bankrupt. We lack terms for the feminine aspect of life that are multifaceted and rich....

The mythologist Joseph Campbell tried to enlarge our discussion of femininity by invoking the following terms:

the left, the side of the heart, the shield side, has been symbolic, traditionally and everywhere, of the feminine virtues and dangers: mothering and seduction, the tidal powers of the moon and substances of the body, the rhythms of the seasons: gestation, birth, nourishment, and fosterage; yet equally malice, and revenge, irrationality, dark and terrible wrath, black magic, poisons, sorcery, and delusion; but also fair enchantment, beauty, rapture, and bliss. And the right, thereby, is of the male: action, weapons, hero-deeds, protection, brute force, and both cruel and benevolent justice; the masculine virtues and dangers: egoism and aggression, lucid luminous reason, sunlike creative power but also cold unfeeling malice, abstract spirituality, blind courage, theoretical dedication, sober, unplayful moral force.

(Femininity Lost and Regained, pp. 1-3)

## **“MASCULINE AND FEMININE PSYCHOLOGY”**

### **Introduction**

This is the fourth in a sermon series on the books and ideas of Robert A. Johnson, an author and psychologist whose approach is related to the work of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung.

Today I undertake to speak about Johnson's ideas on masculine and feminine psychology, subjects on which he has written five short books, which I reviewed this past week, the titles of which are:

He: Understanding Masculine Psychology

She: Understanding Feminine Psychology

Femininity Lost and Regained

The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden: Understanding the Wounded Feeling Function in Masculine and Feminine Psychology

Lying with the Heavenly Woman: Understanding and Integrating the Feminine Archetypes in Men's Lives

### **A problem of language**

In dealing with the subjects of masculine and feminine psychology, we are immediately confronted with a problem of language, and the question whether the terms “masculine” and “feminine” still work for us – whether they have become more confusing than helpful, more controversial than informative.

What, for example, are the qualities and characteristics of masculinity and of femininity? How is the male related to masculinity and the female to femininity; and, visa versa, how is the female related to masculinity and the male to femininity?

As I was pondering this subject this week, a memory popped into my mind from my college days when I recalled confessing to a woman I was dating that I felt like I was a woman on the inside – a statement that certainly caught her attention.

But what did I mean by this? Perhaps simply that I had thoughts and feelings that didn’t find easy entrance into the male world I knew. I doubt, for example, that I would have made such a statement to any of my male friends at that time.

I can also remember thinking at various times in my life that I have felt fortunate to have an interest in sports, games, and competition ... because these interests have allowed me to connect with the male world. But if it weren’t for these interests, I have wondered whether I would have felt largely shut off from the male world I knew, since so many of the interests of other males didn’t much interest me.

I had no interest, for example, in anything mechanical. Not in machines or motors, or cars, trucks, and boats (though I didn’t mind driving them). Or any interest in hunting (though I enjoyed shooting at targets). Or, any interest in going out with groups of guys in high school on weekend nights and racing cars, or pulling pranks, or drinking alcohol.

Nor do I recall ever revealing to any of my male friends that I had in mind the ministry as a likely vocation. I do remember in junior high school one time filling out a form where I was asked to state what I wanted to do in my adult life. I wrote down “banker,” which seemed safe enough, though I had no intention of actually pursuing that.

Recently, after my father’s death, while cleaning out my parent’s house, I found a gun rack and a desk I had made in my high school shop class. Did I actually make those things? It seems a world away. Most of what I remember from my high school shop class was being afraid of the table saw, particularly after it sent a piece of wood flying past my head one day while I was trying to cut a board – proof enough for me that this machine didn’t like me, and, believe me, the feeling was mutual.

I marvel at people who have mechanical interests, aptitudes, and skills. And, fortunately, for me I am married to a woman who has some interest and skill in this area – though, perhaps, to some extent, she has been driven into that role by my near total lack of interest in it.

### **Defining our terms**

So what is “masculine” and what is “feminine,” and how do these terms relate to males and females?

Would it be preferable, perhaps, to try to avoid labeling given qualities and characteristics as either “masculine” or “feminine,” since clearly there’s a mixture of these qualities and characteristics in both males and females?

Have we moved to a place in our understanding where we might pay attention to individuals and their individual qualities and characteristics and not to their gender?

Or, if it is felt helpful or necessary to categorize given qualities and characteristics, might we not better speak of them as “yang” and “yin” qualities and characteristics, as in the Responsive Reading this morning, rather than trying to tie them to gender as the terms “masculine” and “feminine” tend to do?

So, for example, if “yang” is active and “yin” is passive, one would say of a person, whether male or female, that one has a yang quality or a yin quality, depending on what that quality was in that individual. That would seem less confusing and perhaps less threatening than to say of a male that he has a given feminine quality and of a female that she has a given masculine quality.

Please note in our Responsive Reading this morning that I did not include any reference to masculine and feminine, or male or female. This was quite deliberate in order to keep the language open with regard to gender. However, if I were to include these terms, as is often done, I would add a line such as this:

The Yang is the masculine principle in life. The Yin is the feminine principle in life.  
Yang is male; Yin is female.

### **Johnson’s use of “masculine” and “feminine”**

Actually, this is a good place to begin to understand how Robert Johnson uses the terminology, for, indeed, he does use the traditional terms of “masculine” and “feminine,” often feeling their inadequacy. And he uses them in the sense of the polar opposition of the Chinese Taoist yin-yang model. That is to say, these opposites belong to each other, are connected to each other, and in some degree are also *in* each other ...

... which, incidentally, is not the way of the West, for in the West the opposites tend to get set up in absolute opposition to each other, in contradiction and collision, rather than in polar opposition to each other, with an interplay between them.

At any rate, for Robert Johnson, the qualities and characteristics of “masculinity” are typically related more to males and the qualities and characteristics of “femininity” more related to females – which is, presumably, how and why the various qualities and characteristics got assigned in the first place.

But, following the Taoist model, the masculine qualities and characteristics don't belong just to males, nor are the qualities and characteristics of "femininity" the exclusive province of females. Human beings, males and females, are combinations of both "masculine" and "feminine" qualities and characteristics in various mixtures and degrees. Johnson writes:

Just as genetically every man has recessive female chromosomes and hormones, so too every man has a group of feminine psychological characteristics that make up a minority element within him. A woman likewise has a psychological masculine component within her.

(She: Understanding Feminine Psychology, p. 3)

For both Carl Jung and Robert Johnson, all of this has a genetic and biological basis; and, as with other species, it is quite constant, slow to change, and not infinitely malleable – you can't just shift it all around easily or at will.

For Jung and Johnson, the human psyche is as genetically and biologically based, structured, and constant as the form and structure of the human body.

Indeed, for them, the body and the psyche are simply the inner and outer aspects of one entity. The human psyche has its needs that must be met to maintain its health and vitality just as the human body does. But it's all one entity.

### **What characterizes "masculine" and "feminine"?**

Well, what for Johnson characterizes the masculine and feminine principles that have this biological basis? In my reading this morning, I read a traditional understanding in the quote from Joseph Campbell.

Johnson also refers to a characterization of Irene de Castillejo in a most interesting book, titled, Knowing Woman. There she describes the masculine as being essentially "focused consciousness" and the feminine as being "diffused awareness."

Yet another way to think of this, says Johnson, is to see the masculine principle as outer-directed and the feminine principle as inner-directed. He writes:

The masculine component in personality, in man and woman, deals primarily with the outer world, while the feminine component deals primarily with the inner world.

((She: Understanding Feminine Psychology, p. 48)

One of Johnson's concerns is that currently *both* men and women are facing the outer world with neither tending the inner world, thus bringing about an imbalance.

### **The wounded feminine principle**

This leads me, then, to the dominant theme of Johnson's work as it relates to masculine and feminine psychology, namely, the wound that has been delivered to the feminine principle in our Western civilization, a wounding that continues apace and may, indeed, destroy the entire civilization that we have built up, and much else besides.

This wounding has to do with the "masculine" striving toward achievement, production, and efficiency, while what is driven out is the "feminine" quality of relatedness: relatedness to other humans, relatedness to the interior life, relatedness to nature and the rhythms of nature, as well as to the rhythms of the body and the inevitable stages and passages of a human life.

It's nothing particularly new to say, but Johnson sees us a deeply unhappy people: exhausted, overextended, frantic, at the very limits of our strength and energy.

Personally, Johnson felt this unhappiness so deeply and this wounding so severely that he went in search of a place and people where the feminine principle was not so undervalued or wounded. He found such a place in old India – not new India, which is hurrying toward the West, but old India – a place where the problems are nearly the opposite. He writes:

Our Western attitudes toward femininity are so deeply ingrained that it is impossible to gain perspective on them without going entirely outside our own culture. It was my journeys to India that awakened me to a vastly different outlook on everything feminine. The feeling tone, the valuation of femininity, occupy infinitely high places in the East Indian ethos. Just to walk on a street in traditional India is to walk in valid feeling....

Our Western heroic achievements are the envy of the rest of the world, but they were won at the cost of our capacity for warmth, feeling, contentment, and serenity. We are so rich in things and so poor in feminine values! I saw peace and happiness in the most unexpected places in India! With so little to be happy about, how is it that these people are so contented? At the cost of modern technical accomplishments, they have maintained their feminine values.

(Femininity Lost and Regained, p. 6)

Thus, for perhaps 20 to 25 years, for several months at a time, Johnson would journey to India to bask in the warmth of such relatedness, each time upon his return feeling the cold shock to his system.

## **Myths**

Johnson has the idea that when a new era is about to begin – ours, he believes, began in the 12 century – the unconscious will already have a sense of what is on the horizon that the conscious mind is not yet aware of.

The dynamics of this future issue are not laid out directly in a cognitive way, but rather appear in the form of stories or myths, which speak to the dynamics of our interior, psychic being.

A myth, says Joseph Campbell, is a public dream, while a dream is a private myth.

The primary myth that Johnson explores with regard to the wounding of the male in our Western civilization is the story of the wounded Fisher King, part of the Grail cycle, in which the Fisher King lies groaning in pain the whole day long from an incurable wound.

The Fisher King's wound, though it is in the male part of his anatomy, is essentially a wound connected to his feeling side, or in Johnson's terms, a wound to his feminine dimension, because it is through the feminine side that a man finds meaning. Says Johnson:

The fisher king wound is to be seen on the face of almost any man who passes on the street; the ache of life, the anxiety, dread, loneliness, the corners of the mouth pointing down....

(The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden, p. 22)

Part of the solution for a man, Johnson says, is to recognize, differentiate, and untangle the basic relationships he bears to the feminine world. Johnson identifies six basic feminine elements for a man in his book He. In his book Lying with the Heavenly Woman, he distinguishes eleven feminine elements.

I don't have time today to go into these today, but just as an example, he says it is important to differentiate between one's outer-world, physical mother and one's interior "mother complex," the mother complex, being the wish to return to dependency and the demand to be cared for as when a child.

When a man falls into this dark hole, the physical mother tends to get blamed for this desire that she cannot possibly fulfill. Thus, says Johnson, one needs to differentiate and untangle these two feminine relationships, for one is outer and the other inner. Or, as I have heard him put it, "For goodness sake, deal with your mother complex and leave the poor woman alone."

### **The meaning of the feminine wound in women**

Thus, Johnson identifies the feminine wound for men as being associated with a loss of meaning and value, even in a life that may be filled with material abundance. One loses one connection to one's soul, and does not know who or what one serves, so that a life goes dry. The generative, creative function is knocked out resulting in loneliness, isolation, and immense, unspoken suffering.

For women, the wounding of the feminine principle is also related to their creativity, but even more to their very being, for women, as Johnson believes, are nearer to soul.

And so, says Johnson, the wounded feminine in women is associated with incapacity, so that a woman feels incapable of doing anything. “What can I do? What can I do?” is her cry.

In our patriarchal society, there are few stories that speak of this wound, but one that Johnson identifies is the story of the handless maiden, a story that circulated in Europe in various forms prior to the industrial revolution.

### **The story of the handless maiden**

The story begins with a miller who grinds grain to make flour for the village. He works hard, turning the grinding stone by hand.

One day the devil appears and says, “For a fee I will show you how to grind your grain with much less effort and much faster.”

The miller is intrigued by the offer and immediately agrees.

Oh, and the fee? “That which stands behind the mill” ... which the miller knows is only an old tree, something quite worthless.

So the devil brings in his mechanical expertise and connects the miller’s grinding stone to a waterwheel by means of which he is to grind much more grain, much more quickly, and with much less effort – easier, faster, more.

The miller is delighted; the miller’s wife has extra income; and the miller’s daughter continues with her innocent life.

The miller is so pleased with his new life that he quite forgets that there was to be a fee involved and is surprised one day when the devil shows up to collect his fee; and then horrified to find that what stands behind the mill is not just an old tree but also his daughter who, as it happens, is behind the mill just at this time.

The miller is devastated by the situation, but also unwilling to give up his new life. And so he gives his daughter over to the devil, who proceeds to chop off her hands and take them with him.

But life is not so bad for the handless maiden; she is quite content. Indeed, in all versions of the story, says Johnson, she does not object to the sacrifice of her hands ... for, with the extra income, servants can be employed to do her work. Her hands are not needed, and the family is compassionate and attentive to her needs because of her wounds and her sacrifice.

Everything seems a-okay ... until one day the handless maiden begins weeping, and cannot stop weeping.

Instinctively, then, she retreats to the forest alone and, with difficulty and the assistance of an angel from heaven, makes her way through a swamp where she comes upon the garden of a king, a garden that contains a prized pear tree, each pear carefully labeled and numbered.

The handless maiden after the difficulties of her journey through the swamp is, as you can imagine, very hungry and so somehow manages, even without her hands, to eat a single pear from the tree, enough to sustain her – and, thenceforth, one pear a day for a number of days, until the king’s gardener reports to the king that each day now a pear has been missing from his precious pear tree.

The monarch, a kind and just man, waits one evening in hiding with his gardener to see what is happening to his beloved pears.

As morning dawns, the king and his gardener observe the pitiful sight of a handless maiden approaching the tree for her single pear. At this sight, the king falls instantly in love with her and will have her to be his queen.

The handless maiden protests that she could not possibly be his queen without her hands. But he assures her that everything will be done for her; she will need no hands. His reasoning is persuasive; he wins her over, and they are married.

The king and queen do find, however, that certain graceful activities of a queen cannot be managed without hands. And so, after a time, the king calls in his magicians to prepare two silver hands to be fitted to the queen’s handless arms. This is all quite wonderful, and the queen’s “silver-handed ways are the talk of the whole kingdom.”

In due time a baby boy is born, and, again, for a time, everything seems to be well, when, unaccountably, the queen begins to weep and again cannot stop her weeping. Apparently, she wants to take care of the baby with her own hands.

The well-meaning king tries to convince his weeping queen that the servants can take care of all of this. But this time his logical arguments do not prevail; the weeping continues, and the queen with silver hands again retreats to the forest, this time with her child, living on the simplest fare, while the king, her husband, is frantic with concern.

As with many tales, it’s in the forest and in solitude that the transformative miracle occurs. In our story, it takes place when the silver-handed queen’s baby falls into a stream and would be drowned. The queen cries out for her servants to come to rescue her child. But none are near, and so none hear.

In desperation, then, the queen plunges her useless silver hands into the stream, and when she draws her child safely forth from the water, her hands are completely restored to flesh and blood.

(The story above is a condensation of Johnson's telling of the tale in The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden).

## **Explanation**

For Robert Johnson this tale, which, as I say, came into being well before the industrial revolution, tells the story of how the wound to the feminine principle is made, and how it affects us all, but particularly women, since women are typically closer to the feminine principle. The story, as all good stories, not only lays out the issue, but also a solution.

Johnson maintains that every labor-saving, mechanical advance creates a wound to the feminine feeling function and comes at a price.

Johnson is not against scientific, technological, and mechanical advances. Indeed, he believes that the attempt to get rid of mechanical aids to achieve a more vivid spirituality, such as proposed by Gandhi with his spinning wheel, or Thoreau at Walden, or the Amish with the horse and buggy is not the way. The problem, he believes, is in thinking that you can get something for nothing. He writes:

The miller is the first mechanic in the modern world; he is the first one to make the stream do his work for him, and he pays a catastrophic price in the form of his daughter's hands. We are from a long line of millers, and the infection is deep. Many times a day in a modern life the young feminine pays the price, a further amputation, when one makes a devil's bargain and believes one can get something for nothing. We might reverse the proverb and say that when one gets something for nothing, he is very likely to get nothing for something in the feeling world.

(The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden, p. 60)

And the solution for a woman, the tale says, is to seek solitude, to go deep into herself. The pear, which contrasts to the apple in another garden, is a symbol of the feminine.

By eating the pear, that is, staying with the feminine, the handless maiden is initially able to return to the world ... where, however, an even more subtle situation presents itself, namely, the invention of the silver hands, which would seem to do everything that is needed, and for that reason is all the more dangerous to feminine feeling, to real relationship.

Johnson gives a personal example of a time when he stayed at a very fine hotel while lecturing on the wounded feeling function and telling the story of the handless maiden.

Nowhere in America have I been served more carefully. But all of the service was of the most exquisitely wrought silver. It came straight from a training school that prepares all of its graduates to serve with silver hands – sterling silver in this case. All, that is, except for a big Irish lad who made human contact with me over the breakfast table. He was too genuine to have absorbed the schooling! ... it took the

best possible silver to show the unmistakable difference between silver and human hands.

The first effect that one sees from a silver-handed atmosphere is that it is terribly isolating. To be touched in this way is to be isolated; one unconsciously replies in the same mechanical, unrelated, and metallic way. Silver hands are the death of any feminine aspect of relationship.

(The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden, pp. 86-87)

It is such silver-handedness that eventually becomes too much for the queen. She begins to weep and cannot stop – evidence of something real breaking through.

Again she must retreat, again connect with her deeper being and the larger life of nature. And this time, she makes a fuller contact so that her flesh and blood hands are restored to her.

She has paid the price and so the possibility of real relationship is possible again, even in a world of many mechanical things.

What was it that healed her and restored her hands?

Was it the plunging of her hands into the healing water that effected the cure – much as the tears had been healing before? Or was it simply the passage of time and the long, painful process of the solitude that healed her? Or was it the sudden eruption of love and devotion to her child? In any case, the healing is a marvel of interior evolution and the faith of a woman capable of following her own feminine way.

(The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden, p. 94)

### **Benediction**

May the love that gives to life its beauty,  
the reverence that gives to life its sacredness,  
and the purposes that give to life its deep significance  
be strong within each of us  
and lead us into ever deepening relationships with all of life.  
(from George G. Brooks)

### **Extinguishing of Chalice**

And now we extinguish our chalice  
But not the light of truth,  
The warmth of community,  
Or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts  
Until we are together again.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the service given by The Reverend Bruce A. Bode at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on March 18, 2007. The spoken service, available on audio cassette at the Fellowship, may differ slightly in phrasing and detail from this manuscript version.)