

# Coniunctio: Transforming the Wound of the Heart

by Carole Darnell

I came into this existence with a seed planted in me at my making. In the beginning I did not know the meaning or purpose of this seed, nor had I discovered a language in which to express its significance for my life. Nevertheless, this seed guided my every thought, word, and deed in ways that even bewildered me, not to mention my own family.

When my mother told me to iron my older brother's blue jeans, I wanted to know why he didn't have to iron them himself. Her answer, "because ironing is girls' work" did not make sense to me, so I chose to be grounded rather than obey. My father told me one Sunday "you can either go to college or get married." I asked why my older brother didn't have to make that same choice, but my father hid behind the Sunday newspaper apparently unable to answer. My father and I had regular intellectual fireside chats in which I was told "women are stupid, uneducated, too emotional, sensitive, weak, and needy" and in the same breath, "you can be anything you want to be, including the president of the United States." It was as if I was his only son. Couldn't he see I was a member of this "inferior" sex? Why didn't he consider how his words might crush my soul and affect my entire life?

These two very conflicting messages came from the two most prominent shapers of my life, my mother and father. Moreover, the same conflicting messages were reinforced by the culture, education, media, and religion. Upon reflection, it appears these painful conflicting messages regarding the masculine and feminine became the "fertilizer" for this seed planted in me at my making. Each morning, I woke to a faucet of fear gushing into my belly as the aching wound in my heart grew wider with each beat.

I once saw my father pin my mother to the wall by her neck, her terrified brown eyes pleading with me to save her. In that moment, I vowed never to become that vulnerable, deciding instead to follow my father's lead. I too wanted power. I did not want to end up a victim like I perceived my mother to be! Nevertheless, I was still too young to gain any real power over my life, and before long, my mother intervened, plotting behind my back a wedding to a man of her choosing, while closing all doors to other suitors. As soon as I turned eighteen, I felt her hands on my back, pushing me down the marriage aisle on my father's arm. I felt like a lamb being led to the slaughter, crying all the way about something I could not even name. As you might imagine, her choice for my husband seemed more like hitting the instant replay button. In retrospect, at that time in my life, I'm not sure I could have made a better or more conscious choice.

Two children and seventeen years later, I finally escaped this terrible prison sentence. After all, in many ways I had fol-

lowed in my father's footsteps, becoming fairly successful financially in a male dominated career. Certainly it was not an easy task being a single mother, especially since I had little financial assistance from my ex and absolutely no parental help since he considered parenting "women's work" and beneath him. For the next ten years, I stayed this course of exhaustively "doing it all," carrying both the masculine and the feminine energy for my family.

As my youngest left the nest for college and I entered mid-life, I finally collapsed, unable to push myself another inch. I had reached the end of my masculine rope, or was it my feminine rope? I was too exhausted and dried out to know. I felt like a cracked, parched desert floor, aching for something soft, sweet, and comforting; maybe wet like tears. Something I couldn't name, something that now demanded my complete attention. But who would I be if I was not soaring out there, flapping my wings and winning all the awards? What would happen if I just stopped flapping my wings all together? Would I plummet to my death? I did not know. I remember thinking, "if this is all I can expect from life, I'm done." If folding my wings meant I plummeted to my death then so be it. At least this would be swifter than this slow agonizing death—each soul-less day repeating itself. Poised at the edge of a huge black abyss, I leapt head first ... falling... f..a..l..l..i..n..g... I quit my cushy corporate America career without a plan for future income. All my friends were sure I had gone over the edge. In Jungian terms, I had.

The next year was spent in a sabbatical wherein I became completely "undone." We Jungians prefer to call this the "dark night of the soul," and indeed it was. I wept constantly, tears that immediately soaked into the dried, parched desert landscape within. My therapist suggested anti-depressants, but I knew I wasn't depressed. I read profusely, gravitating toward Jungian authors who seemed to have a language for my current demise: the abyss—the dark night of the soul. I couldn't stop watching Joseph Campbell's DVD *The Hero's Journey*. I wondered if heroines take a similar journey and found Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey*. I ran across a quote from Joseph Campbell about marriage. He said, "Marriage isn't a love affair. It's an ordeal, basically of losing yourself in a higher polarity; the interdependence of relationship." I think one of the problems in marriage is that people don't realize what it is. They think it's a long love affair. And it isn't. It has nothing to do with being happy. It has to do with being transformed. And when the transformation is realized, it is a magnificent experience; much greater than happiness. But you have to submit. You have to yield. You have to give. You can't just dictate."

While I knew the absolute Truth of Campbell's definition of marriage, I was sure the "transformation" to which he referred was regarding this terrible split and inequality between the masculine and feminine. Surely he was referring to patriarchy when he said, "you can't just dictate." Still, I wondered if I had submitted, yielded enough. From this point in the abyss, it seemed

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that one more submission would have been utter collusion with the devil himself—the soul murderer! Nevertheless, here I was in the deepest, darkest abyss of my life. It was I who leapt, surrendered, and turned my back on every other place I had looked for God out there. Perhaps I had gone crazy. The gap between the world's god and the Real God is a terribly deep and wide void. There was no going back. I could only surrender, let go, and fall without even knowing if there was a God to whom I belonged. Did it *really matter whether I lived or died? I have to admit, this void was impressive. At its darkest stillness, I felt a kind of release that opened a space in me of utter Peace.*

I dreamed of empty white houses. Inside, a single sofa draped with a white sheet randomly arranged in an empty room whose open windows were draped with white gossamer curtains that billowed outward, dipping like yearning fingers into the azure-blue sky. Billowy white clouds floated by on their way to kiss father sun. A single huge black cockroach crept along the floor, following a ray of sunlight. It was a time of such darkness and fear, followed by what seemed like purification. Close to the end of that year, it was like a hatch opened at the bottom of that abyss. I fell through only to land on a soft white cloud, floating along while being bathed in golden sunlight. It was as if I had removed my suit of masculine armor and was re-born, stepping into my new life totally naked, one bare toe at a time.

This was immediately followed by a deep meditation in which a huge portal opened, the purpose of which seemed to be for intense spiritual instruction. Words were not used. It was a kind of “transmission” regarding big questions such as “what is the *real* purpose of life.” I came out of that meditation on fire, my feet not touching the ground, infused with a kind of energy

that catapulted me at break neck speed into graduate school in psychology, on to an internship, state boards and licensure. After which, I opened a center whose name reflected the focus of my life's journey.

I came out of that meditation with the phrase, “the merging of opposites.” A Google search revealed the word, *mandorla*, the almond-shape created when two circles partially overlap. The *mandorla* is the sacred space from which balance and reconciliation are birthed. Perfect! The Mandorla Center was thus birthed! A sacred space wherein the masculine and feminine could finally come together and perhaps birth Peace! This had been the focus of my entire life and apparently, according to this meditation, was the Mystery into which I would continue to unfold the last half of my life. Could it be possible that I myself might be engaged in such a passionate and harmonious dance?

Now eleven years into my private practice, that seed planted in me at my making seems to be unfolding into a lush blossom, dripping with sweet nectar! The degree to which my humble beginnings were dominated by a driving negative masculine energy was the degree to which I needed to drench myself in the sweetness of my feminine energy. It seems nature's feminine wisdom of completion had been at work all the while! In reflection, it appears my entire life's journey has been on the way to what we Jungian's call the *coniunctio*; a heavenly harmonious dance between the inner masculine and feminine.

For me, my work in depth psychology is my journey into the feminine. The structure and maintenance of my private practice comes from my masculine side. The title “wounded healer” fits me well. While I enjoy my work with individuals and groups, my passion lies in working with couples, especially those whose relationship has imploded due to some crisis like an affair. Each precious couple allows me to hold sacred space for the *coniunctio* couple to be birthed. It is a rare and sacred occurrence. Perhaps even God in manifestation—certainly a path for healing our planet. During our nation's recent inauguration celebration, a reporter said, “it appears our nation has begun to realize that the credence ‘all men are created equal’ is not referring to white males only. A new kind of equality is emerging. A more progressive movement is underfoot in our nation and there is no turning back.” After hearing this, perhaps it is safe enough for me to share another self-disclosure.

Unlike many Jungians, I do not believe the final frontier is the *coniunctio* or inner marriage. Yes, I admit, my theory could be no more than that; a theory, an intellectual position, an ideal. Nevertheless, this seed planted in me at my making informs me otherwise. It informs me that this divine heavenly *coniunctio* couple, this inner marriage, must be manifested in the physical world! Otherwise, what's the point?

Indeed, the time has come! We must bring these two energies into appropriate relationship and balance. Otherwise, patriarchy continues, perpetuating every kind of inequality and all its accompanying fall out such as racism, classism, poverty, greed, wars at a global level; the list is endless. Not one of us is without our own horrific stories of suffering from this deeply wounding split; two isolated frozen poles of opposing energies, the masculine and feminine, between which smolders a cauldron of red hot rage. Could it be that something new is emerging from the ashes; something Mysterious and Sacred...could our planet be re-birthing its very own Soul?

Those of you who know me well, know how I view the world through the lens of this heavenly *coniunctio* couple. Still,

at times I encounter a very dark side of myself, sneering and licking its devouring chops, saying, “Who do you think you are! You know nothing! I’ll tell you where you’re going to end up... burning in that raging cauldron forever!” I think how ironic would it be if I myself did not succeed in manifesting such a relationship in the physical world! Yes, I have created such sweetly balanced relationships with my children, friends, some family members, and my beloved clients. However, I have not yet created that highly challenging and often volatile intimate romantic relationship that consistently, as Campbell indicates, allows conflict to be the catalyst for transformation. I hope I do not disappoint myself, arriving at death’s doorstep only to find that this seed planted in me at my making has grown into a thorny, stinging Bull Nettle plant—a cruel joke by Mother Nature herself! Still, do I have any other choice than to remain utterly and passionately engaged in this delicious masculine and feminine dance, arising each morning full of wonder at what new Mystery awaits my yearning heart today?