

ESSAY

This essay inaugurates a new section in the *Journal*. The Essay Section will present essays of high quality in applied bioenergetics. The main criterion of these essays is that their exposition be guided by functional analysis.—*Ed.*

On Uniting the Masculine and Feminine Principles

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Wilhelm Reich talked about the way we would all like to be in this world. He called it the genital character. This is one who has worked out the conflicts so that he or she is a unified organism; body and mind do not oppose each other but function as a unified whole; energy is unblocked and flows freely, fully available for creative work in the world. The energy is regulated by full body orgasm, which means heart and genitals joined together in full surrender with a loved person; love and sex go together, and therefore sex is meaningful and pleasurable. Behavior is not regulated by moral strictures which oppose natural needs, but it is self-regulated, based on the principle that life is to be enjoyed. Yet he is not a hedonist. He is responsible to himself and others. Because he is in full contact with feelings he cannot be self-destructive nor sadistic toward others. Being connected to his own truth he cannot lie, because telling an untruth is uncomfortable and distasteful. He or she responds to life with spontaneity of feeling, yet is rational, and has the power to make real choices because he is free of internal conflict and repressed desires. The person has a respect and a reverence

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for nature and life in all its forms. That sounds like ecstasy, doesn't it? Why is such a state so difficult for us to get even remotely close to? Why do we experience so much agony, so much conflict?

We know that the blocking and constricting of the energy of the organism begins at birth, if not before, and that as the infant grows and interacts with the environment, it will be shaped and formed on all levels, physically and spiritually, according to its experience and the expectations of society. The patterning of that experience has a somewhat predictable form, and we call it character structure. And whatever the individual structure turns out to be, it will be based upon a splitting of the unitary nature of the organism. We are of course talking about the split between *mind* and *body*; but also the split between *reason* and *feeling*, *logic* and *intuition*, *control* and *spontaneity*. On the societal level it is the split between nature and culture. In *Love and Organism*, Lowen talks about one side of the split—*body*, *feeling*, *intuition* and *spontaneity* as being related to the *feminine principle*; the other side—*mind*, *reason*, *logic*, and *control* as being related to the *masculine principle*. The female principle is identified with nature and the natural order. The male principle is identified with culture and the masculine ego. I'm going to talk about that splitting in terms of the masculine and the feminine principles.

On rereading *Love and Organism* this spring, I found particularly interesting a chapter where Lowen takes an historical perspective and discusses how the splitting occurred along with the development of western civilization.

Eight or nine thousand years before Christ, primitive societies were matriarchal, and the Earth Mother, or mother goddess was worshipped. Feminine functions and feminine attributes determined human beings' relations to nature and to life. Then with the development of culture, consciousness, and ego, man struggled to control nature, to bend it to his will. Thus man became antagonistic toward nature. Accordingly, around 3,000 B.C., there began the destruction of the feminine deities that were so integrally connected to nature, and matriarchal

societies were replaced by patriarchies which worshipped the Father God. The result was the abnegation of women and the relegation of the feminine principle to an inferior position. It meant the end of the possibility of equalitarian, co-participation of male and female.

I'm sure many of you are familiar with a marvelous novel written several years ago entitled *Mist of Avalon*, by Helen Zimmer Bradley. The author takes the legends of King Arthur and tells the tales from the point of view of the women who were a part of the saga. It is also the story of the Druids, worshippers of the Mother Goddess, and their effort to survive in a land taken over by the superior power of the invading Christians. It depicts just this struggle, of culture subduing nature, Father God defeating Mother Goddess. The magic, the sexuality, the "second sight" or intuition of the Druids was a terrifying anathema to the medieval Christians. In this story, it is the old Druid wizard, Merlin the Magician, who understands the necessity of the co-existence of the two religions, and he attempts to reconcile them. But his wisdom is not grasped by either of the opposing forces. (Recently I had this thought: what would it be like if, for the last 2,000 years, instead of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we had had the Earth Mother and the Heavenly Father—who loved each other?) Avalon, the mystical home of the priestesses of the Great Mother, disappears through the mists, sinking into the waters of the lake, to be seen on Earth no more. This of course symbolizes the triumph of the masculine principle and the ego, as the feminine principle and its connectedness to nature, recedes into the unconscious. The splitting is complete.

While we were in France recently, we went to Carnac, in Brittany, to see long rows of stones, which were laid there by ancient Druids. So strange, so mysterious, so different from anything we could relate to in our experience! There I felt a faint reverberation of far stronger feelings of absolute awe I had experienced when I stood on the other side of the channel at Stonehenge ten years before. Standing among those great mysterious stones, I had an overwhelming sense of unfamiliar power ema-

nating from them that stirred something deep inside of me. *It was the power of the fierce, awesome passions of the natural order.* Unbridled, untamed, but somehow contained in those stones. No wonder mankind has had to subdue it and submerge it!

Once the split was established, it was everywhere and in all things reinforced. The masculine principle and the male values were venerated; nature and the female values were called sinful, at worst, and tolerated, at best.

Civilization marched forward, capturing every frontier, conquering and subduing the Earth. We continue the forward thrust—no longer marching but now moving at rocket speed. New eras and new ages happen overnight. Civilization is at its peak. And so is alienation—from body, feeling, and nature. We are confronted daily with the effects of this alienation from body and feeling in our offices and agencies and in our private lives. And we're jolted into reflecting on our alienation from nature when we are awakened in the night by a 5.3 earthquake whose epicenter is a few miles from a nuclear power plant. That such a structure could be built on top of a complicated fault system is for me a good example of the *power madness* and *hubris* of mankind—the fatal characteristics of this splitting that are at the very basis of our civilization.

It isn't easy to get outside our frame, to stand apart from the culture that we've created and all that we've gained from it, in order to see clearly just what price we've really paid. We do have to be jolted out of our deeply ingrained patterns of thinking and perceiving.

Traditionally, encountering death delivers just such a jolt. I'd like to share with you an experience I had several months ago when I was jolted by the terrifying prospect of death—not just my own, but the death of the planet.

In May 1986, I was in Northern Germany with a training group. We met in a lovely part of the country called Lunneburg Heide. I had enjoyed the beautiful forests, the sounds of the birds, and the hum of bees from the clover fields many times before. But this year it was different. We didn't go for walks in the

forest, or sit on the grass, or lie on the sand at the lake. At meal times, there were no salads and fresh vegetables from the garden on the table as before. Because the leaves, the grass, the vegetable garden, and the sand were covered with invisible particles that were carried one thousand miles from Chernobyl one week before. This area measured three thousand times normal background radiation level.

It's one thing to hear about radiation a long way away. That doesn't seem to disturb our usual ways of thinking overly much. It's another thing to know that it is all around you, and there's nothing you can do about it. In the group we talked about the horror created by the accident. Several women said they felt they would have no more children. One man cried when he talked of his four-month-old child. "Everything we thought was so right for our child is now wrong—organic food we grow ourselves, being in the fresh air, playing in the dirt. Now it's a mortal danger to him." I didn't drink milk or eat butter or vegetables. After a week, I left. But all those who live there remain. And some of them are still not drinking the milk or eating the vegetables. Is it safe, or is it not? Everyone agrees on two things: you never know if you're being told the truth; and, no one knows very much anyway.

After that we were at the International Conference in Belgium. The theme of the conference was Culture and the Body. A number of people shared quite movingly their personal histories within their particular cultural backgrounds. At the closing gathering, after exploring our differences, it was clear that we were brought together by our similarities and our oneness as a part of the world community. Many spoke of the Chernobyl accident and its effect on us all. They—our European colleagues—pled for involvement with the efforts and organizations that are trying to do something to change the direction toward total destruction. Because of my personal experience in Germany, I was no longer able to assume it was someone else's problem, or to put off taking action. My own response was to come home and to align myself with the Beyond War movement.

I attended my first international conference in Aspen in 1973, soon after I became involved with bioenergetics. I had read some articles and books by Reich, and I remember asking a couple of the leaders there, since bioenergetics descends from Reich, why was his concern for social issues not more apparently reflected in bioenergetics? The answers I got were something like this: "My work is with individual patients in my office; if some changes for the better can take place in the lives of those people I see, then I've done what I can for society." For most of us, this is where we begin and perhaps where we make our most significant contribution in terms of time and commitment. Yet, in 1986, and after Chernobyl, I personally don't think we have a choice to leave it at that. That is somehow to ignore the agonizing cry of Mother Earth who is saying—Stop this madness before it is too late!

Chernobyl—and the arms race and Star Wars—are the end products of the masculine principle divorced from the feminine, of a culture that developed alienated from nature, from its source. The end result will inevitably be the destruction of the planet.

As a culture, we know that we are alienated—that something is missing. We use what that split has given us—wealth and leisure—to try to do something about it. We pay all kinds of attention to the body these days, but the body remains an *it*—something to be shaped up, tightened, and brought more under control. We rearrange, reorganize, and reprogram feelings without feeling much. We pursue all kinds of old and new, exotic and esoteric ways of thinking that promise a lot but produce little change. Most therapy in our society simply helps us understand why we do what we do and, at best, to function a little better within the system. It all makes one think of Reich's essay on "The Emotional Plague," about man in the trap, endlessly running round and round inside, ranting and railing about it, but everything he does keeps him inside the trap, keeps him avoiding the exit.

The problem is that everything we do to make things better is

still done within the one-sided framework of the masculine principle. So we end up not "getting out of the trap."

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm in no way saying that the masculine principle is "bad." That's an absurdity. God knows we couldn't even *have* a society based on the feminine principle only! It is the split that is bad, that is ultimately fatal. It is analogous to a character defense that evolves in our early development: inevitably, as we grow and mature, what was a survival mechanism turns around and threatens our survival. So in the infancy of civilization, man had to adopt this split, had to pit himself against nature, in order to survive. But now, in its present stage, that "defense" will destroy us and the planet. And it is only in reclaiming the feminine principle—our connectedness to body, to feelings, and to nature—that we will bring about healing of the self and the world.

In discussing these things with a wise and learned man I met recently, his response was, "It is women who will have to save the world over the next one or two hundred years." (I'm glad it was a man who said that!) If it is this split that I've been talking about that has led us on the road to destruction, and healing the split is reclaiming the feminine principle, then it makes sense that we women have a particular responsibility. If we are the bearers of this principle, then we must connect to our own truest nature and live it in all aspects of our existence. Remembering that we are the product of a world that has been lopsided for centuries, that our *thoughts, values, and visions, are shaped by that distortion*, we must find the courage to separate ourselves from that framework. This is *extremely* difficult. This same man motioned to his massive bookshelves and said, "You won't find it anywhere here. You have to look inside yourself." We must look in the depths of the unconscious, beneath layers of conditioning and learning. And, as bioenergetic therapists, we know the importance and necessity of a profound grounding in the body to understand what the feminine principle is about.

We have to look within ourselves. There is nowhere else to look. There are no six easy steps. This is an uncharted course.

As women, we need to validate ourselves and each other in this quest, to share our insights along the way.

Men have suffered from this split as much as women. Men, too, must discover how to reconnect to the feminine principle inside themselves. For me this is what bioenergetics is all about. This is its primary focus: to live in the body, to connect to feelings, and to be rooted in the ground.

Yet with all our work, this integration still eludes us. Who after all gets out of the trap? What incredible, deep fear is it that keeps us inside?

In *Love and Organism*, Lowen says that for women the deep fear that is the ultimate block to claiming the feminine principle is the fear of being alone. I agree with him. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard this phrase from women: "If I really claim my power, I'll be alone." But that power is not the power of men. It is the *Stonebenge* kind of power. If I'm living in my body, connected to my feelings, and rooted in the ground, I have an *awesome* power, and it is often frightening to men. Therefore, it seems impossible to claim this power *and* have a relationship with a man. Rather than claiming it and facing *our* aloneness and *their* fear, women have submerged it and have become subservient, deferent, and controlling. We've become a part of the masculine power system—"the neck that turns the head."

For the man, the deepest fears that arise in relating to the feminine principle are the fears of absorption and castration. For him, it seems impossible to surrender to the feminine principle—to body, feeling, and nature—without losing *his* power. So rather than facing these fears, he maintains a position of dominance and rigidity, or he passively resists.

So I believe that in order to get out of the trap, we must face our fears: we must fully acknowledge them, fully experience them and what they mean to us.

When a woman faces her fear of being alone, and can accept the fullness of the feminine principle within her—no matter what the consequences—she then will have a much stronger ego position as well; mind and body are integrated and unified.

She trusts her intuition so that it nourishes her intellect. She is as assertive as she needs to be and wants to be, without fear, because her assertiveness comes out of her warmth and caring. When a man goes through all he must to face his fears of absorption and castration and works through them, then he no longer need hold at bay the feminine principle. He can surrender to it so that ego is joined to body, reason to feelings, control to spontaneity. And he will find that his power that is born out of this union of principles is not the empty power of domination, nor the insecure power of machismo, nor the arrogant power of judgment. It is a power that is real because it is feelingful, it is certain because it is grounded; it is respected because it is vulnerable; and it is potent because it is connected to the body.

The place where we can ultimately experience the healing of the split is in the pleasure of sexual love—which is nature's gift to us—even though life doesn't always allow it. For in that intimate relationship, the principles can be united inside us. For there we must surrender first to our own body, and then to another person. There we feel our power *and* our vulnerability, our aloneness *and* our connectedness, our separateness *and* our union.

A man surrenders the feeling of power to recover the *source* of his true strength; a woman experiencing the source of her strength can then live in the conscious knowledge of her power. Man no longer feels castrated; woman no longer feels alone. The unification of the ego to the body, and its expression in love is the basis upon which the healing of the splitting of the masculine and feminine principles may take place, and from which we will make every effort to heal the world in which we live. The resolution of the splitting is in the body. This is the exit from the trap. This is bioenergetics at its best.