

# ARCHETYPES AROUND US AND WITHIN US

## A conversation with Carol Pearson

**Michael Toms:** What is an archetype?

Carol Pearson: Archetypes are not as mystical and esoteric as people think. To use a computer metaphor, archetypes are essentially like the software of the psyche. If we use a word-processing program we can write a book; if we use a financial spread sheet program we can do our finances. But we can't get them mixed up. Similar to that we have these narrative structures in the psyche: the Warrior's journey, the Lover's journey, the Sage's journey, the Orphan's journey, the Magician's journey. If we need to go to battle, or conquer something, or achieve a goal, the Warrior can help us do this. It is like a pocket of energy with a narrative structure that can help us gain courage. But it can't help us if we fall in love; it can't help us to be intimate or close with someone. Archetypes are patterns in the psyche that everyone has. Anyone from any culture in any time has access to them. They are inner resources or helpers that we can call upon on our quest.

**MT:** They are deeply embedded within us. How do we find them?

CP: Some of them find us. Very often we don't even know we have an archetype, we're just going around acting a certain way and seeing the world out of a certain lens. They determine how we see the world. Three different people could have an exact same experience and interpret it differently, depending on whether they tend to see challenges, or adversity, or cosmic hope. Mainly we are unconscious of the fact that we have archetypes active in our life, but once we understand that they are influencing how we see the world then we have the possibility for much greater freedom. We can tap into other archetypal realities and realize we could be living in an entirely different story.

**MT:** Many people feel that we live in a time that is much less heroic than times used to be. Do you feel that is true?

CP: Actually no. I do believe many people are less heroic than they could be. Remember, when we think of times past, what we know about is the heroism of very special people. But today if you look even at the work world with the rate of change that is happening--the lack of security, downsizing and so on--the Hero's journey is now pretty much the required curriculum for all of us as we adapt to a complex world. Particularly pertinent is the adventurous quality of the Hero--the ability to ride out and face the unknown, to re-invent yourself, to answer a new call.

The modern world requires us to make all kinds of choices. In the past, society made most of the choices for people. You did pretty much what your parents told you to do. If you got to go to school, you learned what to do there. And on the job your boss told you what to do. You had kings and queens who ordered people around. There is much less control now than there ever was before, which means that we are making radical choices everyday in our lives. This is also related to the Hero's journey, because if we don't have a sense of cause or calling, or a sense of who we are, how do we know how to choose?

**MT:** Many people feel that they don't have a choice, that they are caught in the grip of a vise and they can't get out of it.

CP: Yes, I know--and occasionally I feel that way too. Sometimes it is a vice that has to do with maintaining a certain standard of living. In that case, it is a matter of not having the courage to say, "Hey, I could risk and do something else." But other nobler things can feel that way, too, like

responsibility for your children--when you don't want to take a risk that is going to hurt your children. Sometimes the feeling that we have of being locked in can be a crucible that in and of itself--if it is not because of a lack of courage--can be its own heroic journey. Joseph Campbell said to follow your bliss, and many people misunderstand that to mean that the Hero's journey is about narcissism and just doing what ever you feel like doing. But often these vices we find ourselves in--like caring for an elderly person or a child, sticking with a project or a business when things are going badly, being responsible for other people--are part of the heroic journey. The journey can be about proving that you care for someone other than yourself, and that is a very important part of it. It is about nobility.

**MT:** So, being a mother, father or mentor could be a Hero's journey.

CP: Absolutely. Particularly in the world today, which is so "me first" in its orientation and tends to be narcissistic. One reason that people were so taken with Princess Di when she moved from being the princess to being a real altruist is that at some level we know we can't continue like this: we can't have homelessness on the streets; we can't keep trying to get more and more things. We need to have some sense that we are all in this together.

**MT:** Diana is a good example because she is recognized worldwide. What archetype does she represent? Is the attraction that we see some archetype in her?

CP: By the time she died, we were seeing the Altruist archetype--her reaching out, her love for people and her wanting to help people. But there had been a journey she acted out for many of us, starting as the princess which is archetypically the Innocent. She had the perfect fairy-tale wedding. But then she showed her willingness to express her vulnerabilities, to tell people about her bulimia and what her marriage was really like, how shadowed her dreams were. She came through all this with a large heartedness. There is something about that journey itself that for both men and women--although it is a woman's story--represents a time of innocence being shattered.

On every talk show people are baring their souls and talking about their vulnerabilities. We clearly need to do that. We need to get the shadow out of the closet and be clear about our imperfections, our difficulties, even the ways our dreams have let us down. But the real thing that people responded to with Diana is that she held up the archetype that we need as a culture--the Altruist. The hunger that people are feeling to move beyond separation to show care was reflected in the veneration of her and her death. I understand that there was a shortage of flowers worldwide after her funeral! We could also see it as the evolution of the love goddess Aphrodite, the beautiful princess, into the giving, bounteous mother--which would suggest some growing up of the feminine energy.

**MT:** One could look at her tragic death as a sacrifice in the sense that it produced a massive outpouring of shared grief.

CP: Right. I think that it was more than coincidence that Mother Teresa passed away in the same week. It was an archetypal call to care. And all the fanfare about that galvanized some sense in people of a new possibility. Although when celebrities carry an archetypal quality, the danger is that people will see that quality only embodied in them, rather than seeing that when we venerate someone like that, we do so because they are carrying the emerging archetype for us.

**MT:** Here in the West our heroes tend to be celebrities in sports and entertainment. We don't seem to have any heroes outside of those superficial categories. Why is that?

CP: I don't know, but it is very interesting. Sports, of course, are part of our dominant archetype, which is the Warrior. They are still about competition; although there is some evolution that is

moving the focus from the outcome of the contest to excellence of the athleticism. Particularly in the Olympics you see the veneration of the person who can achieve excellence. Sports figures in some way do that in a clear way. In the business world and our personal lives we may do it in a less clear way.

Entertainment is almost compensatory. Americans work so hard and are so achievement-orientated that we have a veneration for what we miss a lot of the time. So we love our entertainers because they are out there having fun and making us have fun. It is the balance that we need. So we are willing to pay a lot for it, and we admire those people greatly.

**MT:** Where are the leaders that we are supposed to have?

CP: Well actually, I think we do have leaders. In politics we have had some great leaders in the twentieth century. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one, and John Kennedy was another. Our current president is not doing a bad job as a leader in contemporary terms, because what we expect from a leader now is more facilitator than a person way above the rest of us. There has been a shift in what I call the Ruler archetype energy. What we are looking for now is less a great person--unlike us--and more a facilitator of consensus.

When I do consulting and coaching in the business world, I find an incredible number of CEOs and managers who are leaders in the sense that they have a vision, and they want to take on the responsibility not only for making a profit, but also for the people that are involved. They want to be socially responsible. Part of the energy of creating The Inner Edge as a newsletter and tape series is to publicize the kinds of people out there who are willing to make a difference. I was very touched by Robert Quinn's book, Deep Change, in which he wrote about corporate leaders who are willing to be forward-looking and to be thinking about what kind of organizations we need as we move into the twenty-first century. I also see many people on the community level who are willing to simply step forward and run for office and organize for this and that.

One reason we think there are no leaders today is that we see everybody's Achilles' heel. Kennedy, King and Clinton all had their problems with sex, and we know that now. We used to not know those things about our leaders. We didn't know their underside; we didn't know their shadow pieces. As a result, we don't venerate our leaders the same way that we once did. But that is an important evolutionary step. Your radio program, Michael, is about empowering people to be their own leaders, to take responsibility for the world. We can't do that as long as we glamorize leadership, if we see the leader as above us. But when we know that leaders are also flawed people who are willing to step up to the plate to take responsibility, it makes it easier for us to also do that. We realize that we don't have to be perfect to be a leader.

I see so many people today who are on one self-improvement project after another, trying to get good enough to be able to do anything. Ultimately it is better to go ahead and take some responsibility and try to make a difference in the world, than to spend so much time hoping that you will get perfect first.

**MT:** There does seem to be an aspect of our culture that permeates much of our lives. It has to do with needing to control reality, wanting approval and striving for perfection.

**MT:** There is something in the striving for perfection that is quite lovely. People don't want to do harm; they want to be sure when they step out there to make a difference that their shadow isn't in the way. The reality is that it will always be in the way. It is sometimes better to just accept that than to try to get rid of it. There is beauty in that desire not to do harm and to become as perfect as you can be, but it is also a bit of a trap.

**MT:** What about the dominant cynical idea that we are in big trouble, and if someone else sees the world optimistically it must mean they are not being realistic. What about that, is there an archetype there?

**CP:** Absolutely. In the journey, the first stage is the fall from innocence. I talk about the Orphan archetype, which is beginning to be realistic--maybe even pushing the edges of cynicism--feeling the pain of the world, feeling your own pain. Generally, if we stay too long in innocence we get blind-sided and hurt in some way. So we don't trust that archetype, and we press it down into the unconscious where it becomes a created shadow. Then when we see other people who seem very hopeful, we associate that with the pain we felt before we suppressed the Orphan, and we think they must be dupes, they must be stupid--"Boy are they going to get it."

But later in the journey is the stage of the returned innocence, where you've developed your toughness, you have a little Warrior, you've developed your Altruist. You have a lot of other things going on and you are a stronger, more noble person. When that happens, innocence is more mystical. It is based not on thinking that the world is such a great place, but on some kind of spiritual faith, or faith in the process of the universe. Also, what tends to happen then is that when that faith is restored we begin to notice the wonderful things that are in the world, including just how beautiful the city is, or how beautiful nature is. So, you come back to innocence in this full way. If someone else hasn't been there, they see it as the childlike, superficial naiveté they left behind.

**MT:** And they haven't come full circle.

**CP:** Right. They haven't gotten to that stage in the journey. But I do see more and more people who are genuinely happy, and the cynics can't see that. They see the happiness these people are expressing as a temporary thing. But so many people who are now acting on their calling and deep love for people are feeling very connected and doing work that they are proud of as a result. There are incredibly beautiful things around us. The world is changing rapidly as people begin to follow their callings. When I think even of the craftsmanship in the making of household goods and clothing, I see a difference between what things were like when I was growing up and what they are like now. It is not just a difference of technology; it's a difference in people being essentially connoisseurs and loving things, and people who are choosing to not just do something to make a living, but to do something because they feel like they have a particular gift to do it. And then they are much happier people.