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The Impotent Hero

Healing the Wounded Masculine

By Allan Hardman

A chapter from the new anthology,

*The Heart of Healing:
Inspired Ideas, Wisdom and Comfort From Today's Leading Voices*

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Allan Hardman is a gifted spiritual counselor and Toltec Master personally trained by Miguel Ruiz, author of *The Four Agreements* (Amber-Allen, 1997). He is a born teacher, whose piercing insight and compassionate humor create a loving environment that supports growth on the path to Personal Freedom. Allan is an expert in emotional healing, and healthy communication in relationships of all kinds. Allan teaches in Sonoma County, California, and leads "Journeys of the Spirit" to Peru and Mexico. His extensive website, at www.joydancer.com, features an online apprentice program, insightful articles and a complete calendar of spiritual journeys and events.

The Impotent Hero-- Healing The Wounded Masculine

Allan Hardman

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Introduction

Romantic relationship has been both a blessing and nightmare for many people in this new millennium. In the past, the rules of relationship were relatively structured and well enforced by families and cultures. Many relationships were based on the need for security and financial well-being in an uncertain world. Often, mates were chosen based on others' expectations, class, race, or religious backgrounds.

Now, with financial independence being available to most, and ethic and cultural distinctions blurring, men and women are left more to their own discernment and integrity for choosing mates and establishing the rules and expectations of relationship. Along with this freedom has come increasing confusion and uncertainty in relationships of romance and marriage.

One consistent factor that I have observed in my work with singles and couples is their caution or outright fear of each other. They are not able to be present in their relationships with the truth of who they are and what they are feeling. I invite you to consider the following suggestions about what causes much of this difficulty. I am writing this as a man, using heterosexual relationships as the model. Please understand that the dynamics I describe are not limited to those relationships. Wherever I have written "man" or "woman," please substitute "masculine" or "feminine" if it better serves your understanding. Know that the masculine and feminine can be dominant in any gender and interact in any relationship form. It is my hope that these observations will serve you, no matter what form of relationship you choose.

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Who taught you what it means to be a Man?

After asking this question of countless men, I have learned that the answer is often not what one might expect. The first responses are usually “I learned to be a man from my Dad,” or “my Uncle” or a respected mentor. Then a deeper truth emerges: “My dad wasn’t around much,” or “Dad left when I was six,” or “My dad was an alcoholic.” With deeper exploration, most men are surprised to discover that it was not their fathers who taught them what it means to be a man, but their mothers.

They are often even more surprised to realize that the message that they received from their mothers was “Don’t be like your Dad.” The message might have been delivered overtly, when Mother was home at night and Dad was out drinking. She felt alone, abandoned, and afraid. She turned to her young son and said: “I hope you don’t grow up to be a bum like your worthless father. He is not home, he is not taking care of us, and I am left to do everything.” Another boy, in a gentler family situation, might simply observe that his mother is unhappy, and receive the message intuitively. Perhaps she has sacrificed too much of her self for the marriage, and feels lost or unfulfilled.

In either case, the young boy feels this hurt in his mother, and looks for the cause. He does not have to look far to identify his father as the perpetrator of the abuse his mother is suffering. “Mother is hurt, and Dad is hurting her.”

A variation on this dynamic occurs when Dad is carrying the feminine energy in the family, and Mom the masculine. Perhaps Dad is complaining about Mom, and it is his feelings that are hurt. The genders in the story are reversed, but the resulting beliefs and agreements learned are the same: The masculine hurts the feminine.

I believe that males are genetically programmed to be Heroes, and to protect and rescue Damsels in Distress. When a young boy sees his mother hurt, lonely, angry, or depressed, he wants to rescue her. It is his nature. To be a good Hero, there must be a Villain-- and the boy has learned that the Villain is Dad. If the boy stands up to his Dad and tries to stop him from hurting his mother, he will quickly learn how impotent he is to protect and rescue her.

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And here the boy encounters the conundrum that may be with him for the rest of his life: The Villain is not only Dad, it is “maleness,” and the boy has identified himself with that same maleness all of his short life. He is both the Hero wanting to rescue, and the Villain causing the pain.

The young boy becomes the Impotent Hero, trying to protect and rescue his Damsel in Distress from himself, which he cannot do. He takes on the guilt of the Villain, and the guilt of his failure as the Impotent Hero. That conundrum has shaped the

life and relationships of many of the men that have answered my question about learning to be a man. They go into the world feeling guilty for being male. They know they are a man, and they know that men hurt women. They know their job is to rescue women in distress, and that they cannot. They are guilty AND impotent. Rarely is a man conscious of this drama being played out in his inner world.

The Impotent Hero as The Inner Judge

Another way that a boy learns that his Hero is impotent is when it becomes embodied as his Inner Judge. In a perfect world, everyone would be born into a family environment that says: "We are so honored that you are here. We are humbled that we have been chosen as stewards of your precious Life. We will create a safe physical and psychic space here that will protect and nurture your growth into who you came here to be." In the perfect world, children would grow up feeling safe to be themselves, and become whole and empowered adults. They would share that wholeness in all of their relationships.

Since this is not a perfect world, there is unavoidable hurt and wounding that happens to children. Probably the most damaging wound is when the Inner Hero as the Protector, is distorted into an Inner Judge under pressure to conform to the family's system of beliefs.

Imagine that a young boy or girl has a feeling part of the self, and a protective part. For purposes of illustration, I will call the feelings the "feminine" and the rescuer and protector the "masculine." Children express themselves through their feeling side. They experience exuberance and delight, and tears and fears. In the not so perfect world, many of these expressions are unacceptable to their parents or other caregivers. The feelings and the behaviors that naturally arise in the child are judged, and the child feels hurt by this rejection. Children are "domesticated" into the prevailing beliefs systems about how to be good, and how to earn and deserve love. They learn to seek out the reward of acceptance, and to avoid the punishment of rejection.

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When the child is punished, the feelings are hurt. The "feminine" aspect of the self is the Damsel in Distress, and the "masculine" is the Hero that rushes in to protect and rescue. Perhaps that Hero yells out to a parent in a difficult moment: "I hate you, you are mean. Leave me alone!!" I think we can imagine (or remember) the response of most parents to this outburst. (Some older books on child rearing warn that this is a pivotal moment in the raising of a child, and that its will must be broken at this time, or they will grow up to be "willful, spoiled and unmanageable children.")

If the child is punished for this attempt by his or her inner Hero to stop the abuse against the feeling side, this inner Protector realizes that he cannot stop the outside perpetrators. He is impotent to protect and rescue the feminine, so he must create a new strategy. He must protect the feeling side by getting “her” to stop the emotional behaviors that are causing the rejection and abuse. He learns to make

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the feeling self wrong for what she feels. The Inner Hero becomes the Inner Judge, a small masculine self, impotent in the outside world, but increasingly powerful in the inner world.

This new Inner Judge internalizes the criticism and rejection of parents and culture. He recognizes that it is far less painful to his damsel, the feminine feeling side, to be judged and shamed inside by him than from the outside. The Hero turns to his feminine Damsel and says: “Don’t cry. That is stupid. Don’t let them see you like that! Nobody likes a crybaby!” And, “You don’t know what looks good on you. Ask somebody. You are stupid about clothes.”

The Impotent Protector becomes the Inner Judge, in both little boys and little girls. He is the masculine, wounded by his domestication, and fighting to protect the inner feminine the best way he knows how. Together they are in a battle for their emotional survival.

Relationship Strategies of the Impotent Hero

When a man enters a romantic relationship, if he does so as the guilty Impotent Hero, it is impossible for him to say to a woman: “I am a man, and want you!” He is afraid that she will criticize him and reject him. He believes his Inner Judge’s criticisms, and assumes that his beloved will discover his powerlessness and unworthiness. He needs strategies for maintaining the relationship in the face of his fear of not deserving it.

Probably the three most compelling ways that men enter romantic relationship carrying this feeling of guilt and impotence are as the *Rescuer*, the *Rebel*, or masquerading as *The Feminine*.

The Rescuer creates relationship by offering a woman relief from the hurt and fear that she feels from living with *her* Inner Judge. Of course, this means that the Rescuer must find Damsels in Distress to rescue. The Hero makes a promise that he cannot keep: “If you are with me, you will not have to feel afraid or hurt or powerless any more.”

He cannot keep that promise for at least two good reasons. First, her distress is not being caused by a deficiency of The Rescuer in her life. Her hurt and fear are the result of experiences from her past, her domestication, and criticism from her own Inner Judge. Second, if he truly rescues her and heals her pain, she will no longer be a Damsel

in Distress, and will not need The Rescuer. To stay needed, he must sabotage her healing, and keep her in the Victim role. And she knows that she must stay in that role and not claim her personal power, in order to hold on to the love of her Rescuer. The Rescuer and Damsel stay bonded in their relationship and unable to change or grow, in fear of losing the love and comfort that their mutually compatible wounds have brought them.

The Rebel is very independent. He doesn't need anyone, especially women that might intimidate him and see through his facades to discover the Impotent Hero within. The Rebel is oddly attractive to women. There is a safety they see in his emotional distance. After many years of exploring why women often accuse men of being "emotionally unavailable" in relationships, I have figured out who is attracted to those men: Emotionally Unavailable Women! This is a safe place for everyone involved. There is no danger of the intimacy that will threaten the facades and reveal the self-judgments and fears behind them.

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The Feminine Man creates safety in his relationships with women by becoming like them. Some boys, in an effort to rescue their mothers, bond with them emotionally. As adults, they learn feminine ways of relating to feelings. They do not assert themselves in their relationships-- they believe in "equality." This is the eunuch who dresses up in women's clothing to hide in the harem. This man dresses in women's emotions, to avoid being recognized as a man and revealing his guilt and impotence.

Many romantic relationships are based on this foundation of guilt that the man feels for being a man. He must hide his fear of discovery and self-judgement from his partner, and she must agree not to notice.

The Woman's Role

But what about the woman's role? Remember that girls are raised in the same system as the boys. They have the same Inner Judge, the same insecurities, and the same fear that the Judge is right about their defects. They are often taught that to survive financially they need a man. They, too, observe that Mom is hurt, angry, or lonely. They understand that maleness is guilty of causing the pain, and that they can use that guilt to meet their own needs in life. Perhaps Mom says: "Your father is never home, I have to do everything myself, I am so tired-- but he is good to us and provides us with our home and food, so we should be grateful." The message? "The man is guilty of hurting us, but we need what he gives us, so we will use his guilt and impotence to keep him providing for us."

Perhaps the Mother tells or shows her daughters that the real control in the family resides in the females. With their underlying disrespect for their man, they secretly or overtly use their power to manage the family, leaving the man in the role of outside provider-- a veritable stranger in his home.

The Unspoken Agreements

If women are afraid of losing their man, and men are afraid of being exposed as Impotent Heroes, then romantic relationship between them will be difficult, at best. They will need many unspoken agreements to manage the dangerous truths that lie beneath the surface.

Many of these silent agreements are brought into the relationship from the distant past, some are from the relationship itself: "I am not really worthy of love, so I am lucky to have found someone who loves me. I will do whatever it takes to hold on to this marriage." "A good wife is always willing to follow her husband's lead." "What is important in relationship is the long haul. If I demand too much, it will cause problems." "She threatens to leave me every time I bring up our problems. It is better to work these things out myself, rather than saying anything."

<p style="text-align: center;">-§-</p> <p><i>Every society has its beliefs and agreements about how things should be.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">-§-</p>	<p>Every society has its beliefs and agreements about how things "should" be. That society could be a family, a group of friends, a university, a religion, an ethnic group, a political party, or a country. When we are born, we arrive into a family that has already agreed on their system of beliefs. It is their "dream," and they are sticking to it! Since we are born into that dream, we accept it as the truth, learn the intricacies of it, and then even teach the other new arrivals what we have learned: "Don't cry, mommy will get mad at you!"</p>
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As we grow older, we enter more societies with more beliefs and agreements that govern the behavior of the members. Often, the beliefs contradict each other, but the mind has a marvelous facility for compartmentalizing them to avoid the conflict. Think about how many messages there are in western culture about being a Man. For instance, there are the beliefs in the family I described. Imagine the different perspectives of the vital young man beginning his life in the world, and the aging man who feels his physical power and social authority fading away. There is the message from a man's religious faith about what it means to be a man, a husband, a son, and a father. There is the image of being a man as a high level manager in a corporation. . . or a homeless man on the street. Each of these dreams of being a man contains its unique models of behavior, expectations, and the markers of success and failure.

In relationship, all of a man's beliefs and strategies come together with a partner who has accumulated her own set of agreements about what it means to be a woman, a wife, a mother, a daughter, a lover, and a member of a community. Since most people are not aware of these agreements in a conscious way, they simply react according to what they "know" to be true.

It has been suggested, by some, that men and women are from different planets, and thus talk different languages and have different needs. It is my experience and belief that all of us, men and women, are from the same Earth and have the same desire: To know and love ourselves, to be authentically ourselves in relationship, and to do so without fear of rejection and abandonment.

I believe that it is very possible to have that which we desire. To do so, we must become conscious of our many inner voices and the unconscious messages that they would have us believe. That awareness, in turn, gives us the power to choose which of our beliefs and agreements serve us, and which we wish to discard. In creating our own set of beliefs as adults, we "re-domesticate" ourselves into a new way of life. Our new agreements nurture our freedom to live our lives in love, grace and happiness.

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The World's Greatest Lover

Imagine how we might all relate in romantic relationships if men were proud and powerful in their masculine nature, and women trusted themselves and their man. How might a man show up with his woman if he were not afraid of her? And how might that woman receive that man, if she trusted his masculine?

One of my favorite movies is "Don Juan de Marco," with Marlon Brando and Johnny Depp. Don Juan is "The World's Greatest Lover," and in the movie he says: "Women sense that I search out the beauty that dwells within them, until it overwhelms everything else. And then they cannot avoid their desire to release that beauty, and envelop me in it."

That is a great lover: A man who searches out the beauty in the feminine with such authority and love that she cannot help but surrender herself to his love. He is saying "I want you." It is true that a woman can be The World's Greatest Lover, however there is something inherently masculine about that way of penetrating a woman's heart.

In the past, women needed to make themselves smaller than their man to surrender to him. Then, awakening to their collective dissatisfaction, they fought for their

independence, and their right to assert their masculine power in the world. Women became well balanced in their masculine and feminine energies.

Sensing the change, men set out to connect with their disowned feminine natures. They learned to express their feelings, and to listen to the women in their lives. Many began to say that they preferred the company of women to that of overly masculine men.

Men and women became equals, and this shift in awareness has been very healing. From this balancing came a new dilemma, however: No one wanted to surrender to anybody else, and nobody needed anyone! In this equality many people seem to lack any passion for relationship outside of convenience and sexual pleasure. I would like to suggest that something vital and alive is missing. There is a spiritual healing and purpose to relationship that is available when our Impotent Hero becomes "The World's Greatest Lover."

Qualities of the World's Greatest Lover

For a man to be The World's Greatest Lover, he must learn a new way of loving and accepting himself, and his beloved. He must learn that his critical Inner Judge is not telling the truth. He awakens to discover that he was programmed in a certain way to believe his guilt and impotence, and the program is a lie! The World's Greatest Lover comes to understand that his nature is Love, not the fear and doubt that he has lived with all his life.

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A man's
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He comes to this powerful experience when he is no longer judging himself. When our Hero accepts himself exactly as he is, without pride or deprecation, he is prepared to love and accept others just as they are.

The World's Greatest Lover sees the perfection in the Universe unfolding exactly as it is. He is no longer victimized by anyone or anything. His power comes from knowing this Divine Order in Life, in trusting it, and keeping his heart open to the wonders of Creation. He is IN Love with Life. He knows himself AS Life, and knows that all of Life is that same Divine perfection.

Knowing his own perfection, The World's Greatest Lover is not afraid to feel what he feels, nor to think what he thinks. He is not afraid to want what he wants. He is free to come to the feminine, with "I want you!" He is not afraid of rejection, because he has ceased to reject himself. Of course, this voice is alive in the masculine of both genders. When a man speaks it, and the woman sees that she can trust his authority in it, she has the opportunity to surrender to his wanting. I have not known many women who would refuse to surrender to a man who knows what he wants, through the ex-

pression of his Divinity. In a woman's surrender to this Lover, there is the call to her greatness. She knows she will not be asked to be small, because she feels embraced by the expansiveness of his Divine love.

As she surrenders to him, and he possesses her, he experiences the greatest surrender of all. The World's Greatest Lover surrenders to the feminine through his absolute certainty of wanting her. In larger spiritual terms, we can see that the Masculine is opening the feminine to the beauty that he sees. Using the authority of his inner Divine, he acts as a mirror for that Divinity in her. The feminine, as the mate of The World's Greatest Lover, or as any aspect of Creation, sees her reflection in him. All of Creation is thus penetrated and enlightened by The World's Greatest Lover.

The Impotent Hero, destined always to rescue, now comes to his Beloved and all of Creation as the Lover, to release her from her illusion that she is not Divine. He celebrates the highest expression of living as a man: As The World's Greatest Lover, knowing the truth of his Divinity, and reflecting that Divinity back to his Beloved. In that reflection, she joins with him in knowing their highest truth together.