

SOVEREIGN LOVE

A GUIDE TO HEALING RELATIONSHIPS
BY RECLAIMING THE MASCULINE
AND FEMININE WITHIN

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 **sounds true**
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Introduction: My Fascination with Love . . .

“look inward—the loving begins with you.”

OPRAH WINFREY

for most of my life, I was a love agnostic. I believed in love in theory—I have always loved rom-coms, and can't watch *The Notebook* without feeling a deep, subtle ache in the pit of my stomach. I love stories of people who've fought for their love through distance, and decades, and against everything logic would suggest made sense. But I just didn't really believe that that type of love was possible in real life—or at least not in a sustainable way.

Despite this personal ambivalence towards the concept of deep, abiding love, as I came into my private therapy practice, I found that I had a strange affinity for working with couples. I discovered that I could feel into the unspoken emotions that were happening beneath the surface for each person and subsequently playing out in their relationship dynamic, and I had an ability to interpret what I was seeing in a way that really shifted each person's perspective. As time went on, my work with these couples made me start to think that maybe I did believe in the possibility of a love that catalyzes deeper healing, supports our growth, and makes us feel seen. I began to think that maybe this type of love did exist for some people—and that I just hadn't experienced it personally.

You see, I was married for eleven and a half years. And although I was married to an incredible person who remains one of my best friends to this day, something about our union always felt a little bit off for me. After the expiration of my marriage, I began to view my work with couples

through a different lens. I felt like a full-on relationship anthropologist. I had a unique perspective as a therapist, with firsthand knowledge of the variables that make long-term partnership so difficult. But with a little bit of distance from my own fears around my marriage coming to an end, I was able to view partnership with an objectivity I hadn't previously had.

With this newfound objectivity, I was able to notice a few important things. There are certain unspoken dynamics that I heard people grappling with so often, they began to seem like the inevitable realities of modern love and relationships. Here's a sampling of them:

- Women operating from a persistent baseline of anger and resentment about the share of the emotional labor they're carrying, feeling a general malaise and sense of burnout with their entire lives, and describing a feeling of exhaustion that no amount of rest can satiate.
- Couples living in such a deep state of enmeshment, that there's no sense of where one person begins, and the other person ends. This is a common occurrence in partnerships where each person feels like they've lost a sense of being an autonomous individual.
- Women consistently asking the men in their lives to be more open about how they're feeling yet becoming irritated the moment their partner attempts to use them as an emotional sounding board.
- One partner feeling frustrated with the lack of physical intimacy in the relationship, while the other person feels aggravated by what they consider to be a constant squabble about sex.
- The survival strategies developed by couples in childhood creating a dance of pulling love in, but then pushing it away once it gets close. This dynamic makes it nearly impossible for many people to experience emotional intimacy—both while dating and once in a committed partnership.

- An overall sense of dissatisfaction with the reality of what the quest for romantic love and partnership in modern times has turned out to be. The responsibilities, lack of aliveness, and constant bickering make partnership a vast departure from the fulfillment we're conditioned to believe we'll experience once we find "the one."

What's been interesting about witnessing these dynamics unfold for my clients is that they are the same variables I experienced in my own eleven-and-a-half-year marriage. I too experienced the feeling of needing something more from a partnership but being unable to crack the code of how to feel relational fulfillment. While attempting to connect the dots of my own experience of marriage and divorce with the patterns I observed with my clients, I've come to understand that there are internal dynamics that are rarely discussed in mainstream conversations about romantic love and relationships: most specifically, the interplay of the masculine and feminine energy everyone inherently possesses.

Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychiatry Carl Jung was the first to point out in his work that the human psyche is made up of elements that could be considered both "masculine" and "feminine" ways of being. And while both masculine and feminine polarities are present in every person and every relationship, when we are unaware of the interplay of these dynamics within ourselves and those around us, I have found that it creates an internal struggle as well as a sense of disharmony with any partner we choose.

Once I made this discovery and explored it deeper, I began to see it from a cultural and historical perspective:

- A wounded patriarchal culture has caused women to pass down internalized contempt for their internal feminine through the generations, creating conflict within and resentment towards their partners.

- A patriarchal society has taught men that the only acceptable outlets for feeling their emotions are through anger and sex, cultivating a culture where men are incapable of experiencing intimacy in their romantic partnerships.

Carrying these wounds has created a sense of disintegration in our partnerships.

My practice has shifted towards integrating these polarities—first within ourselves, and then within our relationships. To me, understanding these dynamics is the key to ending the unspoken war of the sexes that I see playing out every day in our relationships. I have found that an increased awareness of these dynamics helps the couples I work with move away from codependent, transactional views of what relationships “should” be, towards an interdependent, harmonious state where both partners are present, self-aware, and strong in Self.

This book walks you through the process of reclaiming the (capital S) Self and understanding how the integration of our inner masculine and feminine is the path to finding a sense of peace within, as well as the key to experiencing fulfillment in all of our relationships. In combining my personal revelations as a therapist with a modernized conversation around what it means to love one another well and a feminist perspective on resisting patriarchal trappings, I hope to offer you a deep and yet tangible guide to greater self-awareness of what has shaped us, and how we can take responsibility for finding greater harmony in all of our relationship dynamics.

In order to share how I’ve come to this understanding, I realized I’d need to share some intimate details of my own story. While there are elements of my story that still feel extremely vulnerable for me to share, I often remind myself of something my friend John Kim wrote in his book, *Single on Purpose*: “Be courageous: when others relate to your story, your story becomes bigger than you.”¹ So I’ll be sharing an honest account of my own faltering journey of attempting to understand these concepts in my personal life, while also illustrating the methods I’ve used to support couples, providing tangible tools for working with masculine and feminine energetics, and practicing interdependence within our partnerships moving forward.

Unfortunately, integrating these ideas is not as simple as taking a quick love language quiz or watching a masculine vs. feminine video on TikTok (though those are fun and can be quite helpful). This is work that requires a deep dive into our internal landscape to unpack the historical, cultural, and highly individual reasons of why we love the way we do. Once we understand our motivations, we can choose to consciously love in a way that serves us and acts as a catalyst for growth. I've seen the incredible impact this shift has had on my own relationships as well as the couples I've worked with, and I feel called to share these revelations and techniques with you in the hopes of supporting others in experiencing the wholehearted, satiating kind of love that is rooted in self-awareness and interdependence.

I've split the book into three parts to help guide you on the path to understanding the interplay of these dynamics. The significance of these three parts is based on the human process of **individuation**, as defined by Carl Jung. Jung suggested that in the first half of our life (normally up until about thirty years old), we are oriented toward the external world, which is typically associated with a more masculine energy. We are conditioned to believe that we will be safe if we follow a specific formula for what it means to live a good life: go to school, get a good job, get married, etc. As we begin to shift toward midlife, there is normally a catalyzing event that causes us to begin the **individuation process**, prompting us to look within (an activity which is associated with feminine energy) and question the sense of certainty we carried up to this point. This event can be a divorce, death of a loved one, or some other significant loss of identity. Finally, after we go on our own personal hero's journey into our inner world to identify a sense of truth within our own experience, we return to our villages, so to speak, forever changed. This part of the process represents an integration of our masculine and feminine energetics and brings a new sense of awareness about how we want to live—and ultimately, how we want to love.

The collective misunderstanding of our need to move through an individuation process is, from my perspective, so much of what has been missing from our psychological explorations of love and relationships,

and also what has been causing such deep discord in our partnerships. This is a vital stage of human development that our society has completely lost its connection to. The integration of our own masculine and feminine energetics (which is essentially our ability to stay grounded in a solid sense of Self, while knowing that we will continue to evolve and change) is the third stage of our individuation process.

I've broken down the understanding of these three stages throughout the book as follows:

Stage One: STRUCTURE

- experiencing the world through the lens of a **masculine energetic**
- oriented toward the external
- complete identification with physical form (ego)
- rules of life have been laid out by an external authority

Stage Two: SEEKING

- shifting our experience of the world toward a **feminine energetic**
- orientation begins to shift toward the internal
- longing to feel connected to something larger (Soul)
- questioning of what might be true beyond what we've been conditioned to believe

Stage Three: SOVEREIGN

- tangible integration of masculine and feminine energetics
- emphasis on defining self and relationships from an embodied sense of Truth
- longing to be of service in relationships from a space of love instead of fear
- seeing relationships as an ever-evolving curriculum, helping us to expand and find deeper layers of healing

Throughout the exploration of these stages, I'll help you identify your core energetic, what energetic you've been operating from and why, the polarities between masculine and feminine that are being created in your partnerships, and how to take personal responsibility for shifting your own energy to a more integrated place. The identification of these energetic polarities has completely shifted everything I've come to understand about love. This is the work of understanding the practice of loving as a spiritual individuation process with the potential to bring us into deeper alignment with the Truth of who we are. It is the understanding that at its core, attempting to love another person is a process of healing.

My experiences on my own path to understanding these energetics ultimately broke my heart wide open in the best possible way, making me want to be a different kind of woman. I experienced everything I needed to in order to understand how we might find a sense of fulfillment in the most significant love affair we will have in this lifetime—the one with ourselves. This is that story. Not a single breath up to this point was wasted.

And so here is my hope and my prayer: to anyone who recognizes yourself in some aspect of what I've written in these pages, may this book serve as a guide to bring you back home to your (capital S) Self . . . so that when and if you decide to partner with another, you're bringing an authentic sense of Self to the union.

Stage One

STRUCTURE

CHAPTER 1

The Goal Is to Be Chosen

"if the path before you is clear, you're probably on someone else's path."

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Every Little Girl Dreams of Her Wedding Day, Right?

my wedding day was absolutely perfect. I got married in an outdoor ceremony in a little Canadian town near Niagara Falls called Niagara-on-the-Lake. The fact that it was such a beautiful day felt even more significant because of the amount of stress the torrential downpour the previous day had caused for all parties involved. But on the actual day of the wedding, it was like the Gods smiled down on us and determined that everything would be perfect. The white and pink flowers on the trees surrounding the aisle seemed to come into full bloom that morning, which coordinated perfectly with the pink peonies that had been chosen as the signature flower of the ceremony. The tuxedos and dresses, the table centerpieces and music choices, the perfect flower girl and ring bearer, lovely vows and pre-dinner toasts. Everything was picture perfect. It was somebody's dream come true. Just not mine.

I woke up early that morning. To say I was not feeling overwhelmed with pre-wedding jitters is certainly an understatement, because I spent most of the morning attempting to prevent the smell of marijuana from exiting my hotel room by stuffing towels underneath the cracks of the door while I got high with one of my best friends, and rustling through my luggage to search for the stash I'd wrapped in random dryer sheets

and clothing to sneak my weed across the border. I was a wake-and-bake stoner at that point, and unbeknownst to everyone other than the friend I was spending the morning with, I'd been "stoned to bejeezus" every moment since I picked up my rental car when I arrived in Canada.

I'd made up some sort of bogus excuse for why I needed to travel separately so that my fiancé wouldn't interfere with my ability to anesthetize my way through this unbelievably joyous time. Although in all honesty—I think we both knew I had brought weed with me. We were continuing our already solidified practice of keeping secrets, sweeping things under the rug, and minimizing what felt a little too confrontational for us to talk about. He had, however, made one request of me for the day of our wedding: Please don't smoke pot on the actual day. I, of course, promised him I wouldn't. I, of course, smoked pot from the moment I woke up that morning, to the moment I passed out without consummating a damn thing that night.

I do, however, remember feeling a surge of overwhelming emotion for the first time that day as I made my way toward the aisle. My big brother was standing at the end of the aisle waiting to take me by the arm, and I could see tears begin to well in his eyes as he saw me. I don't think his tears had anything to do with seeing me all decked out in my wedding garb like a paper doll. I think they were more about the fact that weddings are one of the few ceremonial rites of passage that our culture has left. His little sister was being initiated into a new role in that moment. She was becoming someone's wife.

As we began our stroll down the flower-laden grassy aisle, I imagine that most people assumed my energy was focused on the extremely handsome groom who was patiently waiting to devote his entire life to me. It was not. All of my energy was focused on my mother. Was she happy? Did it all look the way she wanted it to look? Was this everything she'd been dreaming of for me? I just wanted her to approve.

I often tell people that I don't believe in regrets. And I truly don't. I think every aspect of our journey—even the cringe-worthy moments—has taught us something we needed to understand. And I hold my younger self with so much compassion when I think about how disconnected she