

FROM THE CORE

A New Masculine Paradigm for Leading with
Love, Living Your Truth, and Healing the World

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INTRODUCTION

MODERN MEN ARE facing a crisis of masculinity, or so we are told. The recent proliferation of men's work programs, books on deconstructing masculinity, and the post #MeToo discourse calling out the toxic masculine speaks to the swell of interest in the present and future states of men. Despite all of the flack men have received lately (much of it deserved), I see brothers every day who are hungrier than ever to step into their lives more powerfully, who sincerely want to love their partners well, who want to nobly honor, empower, and protect their feminine partners, and who seek to be a source of healing in their communities. Men want to know and experience themselves more powerfully. They want to create lives of real impact and have a purpose beyond simply making money. There are millions who want to stand for justice and to redefine what it means to co-create in their relationships and their world today. So many men want to love from their hearts. The problem as I see it is not in a man's desire to step up, but in his understanding of how to most powerfully do so.

Leading men's groups for almost twenty years now, I have seen these impulses passionately arise with a growing sense of urgency. There is an evolving ethos in more and more men to grow beyond stale tropes of masculinity, to be more vulnerable, and to be more available in the world. But at the same time, I see them struggle with exactly how to

embody and manifest these desires at home and in their communities. How can they face the immense pull to numb and to check out, to battle their own demons, negativity, and addictions? So many men still judge their own emotional natures, not knowing how much to reveal or whether their emotionality will be seen as weakness.

A great pain point that men face is the confusion of how to interact with women. Today's woman doesn't need a man to provide or protect her. She can make her own money, she is often more spiritually and emotionally developed, she can parent a child by herself, and she can take care of herself just fine. This fact confuses some men as they attempt to reevaluate and redefine their value propositions as romantic partners. A common complaint I hear is that they are not sure what their feminine partners truly want. Some mistrust the feminine altogether and blame women for their loneliness, as we can see in the rise of involuntarily celibate men. They struggle to fully absorb and navigate this incredibly potent moment of human history with presence, integrity, and love. And yet, I am very clear the vast majority want to.

The paradigm of masculinity we have
inherited no longer works.

These unresolved issues are front and center in so many men who come to my programs and workshops. At the core of most men's exploration into men's work is a desire for belonging. For brotherhood. To love and be loved, and to be seen as noble and good. They wonder what masculinity is and how it can be cultivated as a force of transformative healing; what it means to lead from a healthy, conscious, and unshakeable core; and why the issue of masculinity is even relevant in the world today.

Reclamation

Recent books, podcasts, and published discourses of all sorts have focused on deconstructing masculinity as a whole. I can certainly understand the desire to rid our world of the brutality of patriarchy born of greed and

domination, but I think any wholesale inclination to abandon or cancel the masculine principle shows a misunderstanding of what a truly integrated, centered, and grounded masculinity can provide.

Clearly, the paradigm of masculinity we have inherited no longer works. A quick glance at the rising levels of depression, suicide, and addiction among men should make this abundantly clear. We need a new understanding of masculinity and how it can serve, inspire, and support the world—one steeped in the currencies of feeling, integrity, consciousness, presence, and love; one that supports and devotionally celebrates the rise of the Feminine (which I capitalize when referring to the meta-feminine in all of us) in our culture and doesn't try to dominate, control, or capture. We need a framework of practical understanding that embraces the integration of our own tender and emotional sides, without relinquishing our core masculine gifts and most sacred truths. This framework should not simply reward entrepreneurial, technological, or financial successes but seek to reveal and express the more sublime and profound aspects of a man—his core heart, expansive consciousness, and emotional depth. We need a paradigm that clarifies what it means to strengthen, embody, and, when appropriate, lead from a masculinity focused on liberation and born of consciousness and love.

I know that even using the terms *masculine* and *feminine* is controversial. I will take great care throughout this book to suggest that these concepts are energetic gifts every human (and natural phenomenon) possesses, rather than gender-based labels we have been forced to wear. I've placed most of my thoughts on this crucial topic (especially on the subject of my own biases) in the opening of section 1, but for now I simply want to recognize that far too much damage has been caused by a misunderstanding of what constitutes the Masculine (which I capitalize when referring to the meta-masculine in all of us). Unfortunately, we've been taught that it's the same thing as biological maleness, rigidity, stoic strength, domination, and the endless drive for success. The way I learned and conceive of the Masculine has more to do with spaciousness, liberation, and the transmission of consciousness. And so this book is my attempt at reclaiming what it means to *be* masculine and asserting that it is not something men, in particular, should shy away from, but proudly embrace.

The New Masculine Paradigm

From actor Terry Crews taking to social media to assert “vulnerability is not weakness” to hockey star Kurtis Gabriel publicly denouncing homophobia in sports, the list of public figures calling the old guard of masculinity into question continues to grow. Actor and activist Justin Baldoni took to the TED Talks stage to share why he’s “Done Being Man Enough” and parlayed that into a book and online presence dedicated to examining the paradigm shift in masculinity and the new role men can play in today’s world.

It is abundantly clear that the mainstream culture is beginning to question what type of masculinity should be championed now that the win-at-all-costs machismo of John Wayne and Donald Trump have been so obviously debunked. The patriarchy of old is on its last legs culturally, even if not yet politically and economically. Something new is trying to emerge from the confusion, post-traumatic stress, and cries of yearning for a trustable Masculine from a more vocal and empowered Feminine mainstream.

Kill, provide, and conquer is no longer the exemplary expression of who men are.

I believe there is a new paradigm of masculine depth, growth, and leadership starting to poke through that addresses the subtleties needed. Men want to feel more, express more, and be more vulnerable. But they also crave depth—sexually, emotionally, and spiritually—even from other men. They want to be a healing and holding force for the Feminine in their lives. I have seen it, sitting in circles with thousands of men over two decades. Regardless of the form of practice (psychological, meditative, yogic, tantric, recovery, or support group), men crave more clarity, openness, and meticulous responsibility from themselves and each other. The problem is not desire. The problem is that many still don’t quite know how.

And yet, no matter how powerful, profound, and impactful the men’s work of people like David Deida, Robert Bly, and Sam Keen has been, the overarching framework has failed to do more than spark frothy

discussion in small circles of in-group practitioners across the globe. What I am calling for is an approach that elevates the embodied consciousness of men by giving them a structure of practice and growth they can feel immediately and integrate into their daily lives. The cultural landscape is now more ready than ever to support depth, integrity, and feeling. The shifts of awareness have never been greater. Additionally, women have never been more ready to support men's growth. And men are waking up to the understanding that *kill, provide, and conquer*—be it on the battlefield or in the boardroom—is no longer the exemplary expression of who men are.

Men throughout the ages have sought to create physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual practices in service to love, their world, and the Infinite. What has been missing in the modern cultural definitions of the Masculine is an approach that combines, integrates, and clarifies the disparate calls and approaches to men's work. What I hope to provide in this book is one framework that I have seen thousands of men step into powerfully. There are, of course, myriad other approaches. The paradigm of masculine depth, practice, and leadership I propose takes its cues from numerous streams of thought and practice that have addressed masculine emotional, spiritual, and sexual development throughout the years. Some come directly from the last several decades of men's work, others from Vajrayana Buddhism, various traditions of martial arts, Toltec shamanism, Kundalini Yoga, and the archetypal studies of mytho-poetics. My own experience from teaching embodied men's work has added a thing or two, as well. I hope you'll take what you like and leave the rest. My sincere aspiration is that this set of teachings, offered as humbly and sincerely as I can, will address the fundamental issues facing anyone who is masculine identified today.

What follows is a framework for anyone who wants to cultivate their capacity as an integrated and committed leader. Please understand that these suggestions are never-ending *kriyas*—postures, if you will—that have no conclusive destination. They act as touchstones of reflection and practice meant to be strengthened and explored over time. There is no ultimate arrival, only continual reflection, failure, refinement, and recommitment. With that in mind, this book will invite you to:

- 1 Take complete responsibility for what has been created in your life and in the world around you by ruthlessly reflecting and refining your relationship to it.
- 2 Cultivate a presence and awareness that can feel what needs to happen—in all areas of your life—in both the present moment and your current life situation. Then boldly attune to it and take action.
- 3 Get strong. Not just physically, but by disciplining your awareness and sensitivity, all while strengthening your nervous system to hold and conduct massive amounts of energy.
- 4 Prioritize grounded depth over comfort in your life. Get highly sensitive to the truth of your heart and the power of your intention.
- 5 Align with the Feminine in your life by truly understanding what the Feminine—in all forms—wants and needs from you.
- 6 Become masterful in the art of sexual and energetic polarity. It will empower everything you do in the world in amazing and unsuspected ways.
- 7 Do the inner work to honor, understand, and express your own Feminine nature. Your capacity to feel and transmit the full expression of your gifts depends on it.
- 8 Utilize other committed men to discipline yourself to create an impeccable relationship to truth, depth, freedom, and love. Their loving challenge will become one of the enduring gifts of your life.
- 9 Wake up to the present moment and make it count. Death is coming.
- 10 Commit to integrating these principles into your life as a never-ending daily practice. True artfulness and creativity will flow from it.

These principles may not fully elucidate all the nuances of being a man in the modern world, but I believe they represent a new paradigm of masculinity that will—if you implement it wholeheartedly—change your life and the lives of those around you.

Three Obstacles

The major problem I see in men is the disconnect between the desire to be a force of consciousness and love in the world, and the actual ability to do so powerfully. At the heart of this disconnect are three primary

obstacles. The first is that men have not trained themselves to use mindfulness and meditative practices to go beneath just thinking about their lives and into what would most enhance vitality, clarity, and freedom. The Masculine tends to get caught up in habitual thought loops, trying to answer big questions (“Am I good enough? Will I ever truly succeed? Am I lovable? Am I winning?”) rather than cultivating the type of awareness that fosters more life-affirming truths. Being more attached to our thoughts than our bodies only serves to create more disconnection and stress. And it’s far too easy for men to get caught up chasing the external trappings of success we’ve been trained to go after (money, women, intense experiences, etc.) only to find the core truths within us yearning to be cultivated and acknowledged.

Most thoughts we attach to are also driven by fear and insecurity, and our bodies respond to them with more stress hormones than are healthy. In the end, our bodies pay the price with illness, aches, and numbness—while we just keep churning out more self-centered thoughts. This is the reason why meditation teachers throughout time have been trying to get us to detach and witness our thinking rather than attach to it. Thinking might be a natural process, but believing the content of those thoughts as accurate and true is often a problem.

The second obstacle I see men face is a real connection to feeling—not just emotion, but the ability to sense their own bodies and environments. Think of this connection as analogous to the capacity that great martial artists have to feel their space of engagement. They have developed a sixth sense, so to speak—one that allows them to feel out from their physical forms and intuitively know the next move. They don’t have to *think* about what to do next; they just sense it and do it.

And finally, the third obstacle is that most men simply lack the skill set needed to affect their environments with conscious awareness and embodied sensitivity. We must be able to fully sense the landscapes we most want to affect before we can access clarity about what needs to happen to create more love, freedom, and expansiveness—be it in romance, a larger community, or work. Additionally, we have to know how to execute. How do you move, lead, and communicate as an embodied expression of consciousness? It can’t be said enough that these traits are art forms in the personal, professional, and relational fields that anyone can strengthen

and master. They are meant to shift us from the paradigm of acting out of habit and thought rather than enacting with presence and being.

Most men I meet would love to calibrate into this kind of presence and awareness but are not sure how to begin. Do I meditate? Vision quest? Try Kundalini Yoga? CrossFit? Ayahuasca? What does it mean to really feel my life? My lover? My children? And then be a guiding force for them? What does it mean to live fully from the essence of my masculine core?

From the Core

The crisis of masculinity is a crisis of awareness, feeling, and leadership. The answer isn't, as some might suggest, that men shouldn't lead. We need a generation of conscious, embodied men stepping up to offer guidance and direction in their communities, just as we need to support and encourage women to do the same. Men simply need to learn how to engage life from the truest and most profound places within them—their core hearts, their innate stillness, and the wisdom of their conscious awareness.

To do so, we must (re)train ourselves to go into the deepest parts of our bodies, minds, and hearts, moment by moment, and begin to live from there. We need to make decisions from the core, have sex from the core, hug our children from the core, write books from the core, run our companies from the core, and relate to the moment from the core.

Right now, the center of your heart is infinite and still. It is the seed of consciousness. Do you feel it? Right now, there is a space at the bottom of your abdomen that is the power center of your creative energy. Your *dan tien*, as the Taoists would say. Are you breathing fully into it? Right now, there is a channel in the center of your body that extends from your throat to your perineum that is the nexus of your nervous system. Is it open and relaxed? At this moment of your life, your heart is feeling a truth that wants to be expressed. Are you honoring the impulse? All around you, this moment is unfolding perfectly. Can you feel into the center and source of it?

These explorations into your foundational essence and the innate strengths you possess will provide infinite possibilities of love and purpose. They will lead to new understandings about how to live a more fully resourced, profoundly impactful life. All the success in the world won't mean shit if you are underresourced and malnourished in your core.

I will discuss throughout this book how a man can transition from a thought-driven mode of defending and striving into an open, noble, and trustable place of his core heart. I will talk about how to strengthen your nervous system so that you can hold more of what life wants to give you—expanding your window of tolerance through breath, meditation, and intention. And I will invite you to consciously embrace the Warrior in you, not to gain more personal power and dominance over others but as a gift of embodied presence. I will also speak to how you can expand your feeling awareness as a tool of leadership. These practices can shift the trajectory of your life and enhance your magnetism and power. Men need to know this is possible. It's not something we were taught in school or—sadly, for most of us—from our fathers.

We need to understand that conscious leadership—grounded, tethered to the Infinite, and filled with integrity—is a gift. It's a gift that the Feminine and the world craves from us. This texture of masculinity is a presence-centered transmission, not some marketing-driven archetype à la Rambo or the cookie-cutter guys in the *Fast & Furious* franchise. The type of masculinity I'm promoting here liberates, opens, relaxes, and heals. It's about embodying consciousness and freeing love and truth in the moment. It's dedicated to clarity and to serving the greatest good, moment by moment.

There is no end to how far into our true natures we can go. When we do this, everything changes. People around us relax more, even though they may not know why. Our minds clear and sharpen, our hearts soften, and our bodies relax and open. And we can feel it all—what needs to happen next, what needs to be said, and what others require to embody their own relaxation and openness. And that capacity to feel profoundly inward and outward at the same time and then engage from the purest impulse—one that creates the highest freedom and love—is what I define as leadership.

Engaging the World, Prioritizing the Process

This book will guide you into these explorations using a set of principles and practices I have learned and taught for over a decade now. And while I am an unabashed promoter of men's groups (anyone who knows me is familiar with my impossible goal of creating ten thousand men's

groups around the world), you certainly don't need one to start engaging yourself, your lover, and the world in the ways I'm describing. The techniques herein will help you release your mind from habitual thoughts, distractions, self-serving strategies, and self-referential worries. They'll also help you expand your awareness and capacity to feel. And instead of disconnecting from the living world on some internal, meditative journey, you'll learn how to relate to your environment and other people while tethered to your core truths. The idea isn't to become more isolated, but to heal, lead, and love others well. To do so, we need to bring the Infinite—merged with the full force of our love—into the world. And if you are willing to spend thirty minutes to an hour in daily practice, your entire approach to love, success, and relationships will change. That's my experience, and an experience I hope to share with as many people as possible.

It's important to say at the onset that my exploration of this work has been inspired and informed by thirteen years of ongoing study and practice in seminars and intensives with renowned spiritual teacher David Deida. His seminal 1997 book, *The Way of the Superior Man*, was my opening soiree into men's work and is still one of the most successful treatises on masculine spiritual development ever written. Deida's many books—along with the thousands of hours I've spent in workshops and trainings—have provided me an invaluable base to build my own approach. For those of you who know Deida's writings, the source material will be obvious. His terminology and framework regarding the nuances, traits, and desires of the Masculine and Feminine in all of us, as well as the art of sexual polarity and his three stages of relationship, are foundational jumping-off points for the work I offer here.

Deida's groundbreaking concepts, such as how the Masculine craves ever more freedom and the Feminine ever more love, what constitutes a masculine and/or feminine essence, and how to deepen in both, as well as how to live into the masculine yoga of sexual polarity, create a backbone for my work here. The language he developed in his extensive oeuvre, found in books like *The Way of the Superior Man*, *Blue Truth*, *Finding God Through Sex*, and *Dear Lover*, have now become commonplace for an entire generation of teachers. It's almost impossible to discuss masculine spiritual development or