

The Measure of a Man

By Mel Schwartz

The manner in which we measure our manhood is between stories. The old story was around the apparent strength of a man. A virile man was one who showed no fear, either ostensibly or emotionally. Driven by the warrior archetype the Western model of man was highly driven, competitive and fearless. Given these cultural imperatives, most boys were raised to be strong men, holding back tears and never learning to express problematic emotions. The consequences of this lack of emotional balance are far reaching. They run the gamut from violence and warfare, to ecological disaster, to the ruinous state of most relationships. The masked man wearing the armor of imperviousness is also a man who has little familiarity with intimacy and compassion. His relatives, friends and lovers suffer from his burden, and the world reels in light of it. And perhaps worst of all, such men burden their own lives and limit their potential.

On a more personal level, men's lives are shortened by being out of touch with their hearts. A heart attack might be thought of as one's heart literally attacking them. The attack is a cry for attention. When we don't acknowledge and honor our hearts, they give out. When we, as men, live in denial of our heart energy, we betray the very core of our being.

Vulnerability or Strength?

The new story of manhood is just in its incipient stage. The new model of man that is beginning to emerge is one of authentic self-empowerment. The very emotion that men have been shunning, vulnerability is the pathway toward an integral power that is unconditional. The paradox is that the mask of external strength hides from fear. This only serves to embolden and strengthen the fear and is far from fearless. People who have to act strong are not strong, they are acting. The more that we act and hide away our deeper self, the more we constrain our self-esteem.

The pathway toward authentic self-esteem comes from one's relationship with self. Most men live in accordance with the dictate of what I refer to as other-esteem. They fashion an image of self that they believe will meet with approval from others. This esteem comes not from you but from outside and as such reveals a self-betrayal.

Giving yourself permission to be who you are with whatever your incumbent feelings are is actually strong. The vulnerable man hides nothing, for he is at peace with himself. Therefore, if he feels fear or insecurity and acknowledges it, he no longer is acting from apprehension about what others may think of him. When you come into acceptance of yourself, issues of rejection and judgment tend to dissipate. The emerging model of manhood integrates the feminine aspect of emotionality and vulnerability. Vulnerability and strength are ironically not at all what we may think them to be. Just consider who you'd think stronger, Gandhi or your typical four star general?

The emerging man integrates his feminine and masculine energies into a new prototype

of manhood. This confluence of energy reveals a fuller and more dynamic spectrum of personhood in which men's souls flourish as they embrace their feminine energy, enabling the masculine aspect to mature and thrive. The new measure of a man is how well they honor and respect the various aspects of their being; not just the provider and the warrior energy, but their heart center as well.

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