Journey through Womanhood: Meditations from Our Collective Soul

Tian Dayton, Ph.D.

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Meditations from Our Collective Soul

Tian Dayton, Ph.D.
To my sisters
Kutzi, Eve, Lucy, Annie, and Lynne
with love
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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge you, the reader. I think being a woman is one of the most demanding and challenging roles we can play in today’s world. So many experiences fall within the parameters of womanhood. Today, we’re able to experience more variety, more than at any other time in history. We’re cocreating our roles together and defining as we go.

Next, I want to acknowledge the women in my life. My daughter, Marina; my mother, Elaine Walker, and grandmothers, Anna Legeros and Marina Barbatis; my mothers-in-law, Gwen MacPhail and Ruth Stricker Dayton; my stepmother, Alice; my sisters, Kutzi and Eve; my sisters-in-law, Lucy, Anne, and Lynne, and my ex-sisters-in-law, Alida and Gretchen; my aunts, Connie, Dorla, Patty, Mary Lee, Judy, Lucy, Mary, and Wendy; and all of my wonderful nieces and cousins. Family is important to me, and I have been blessed by coming from one wonderful family and marrying into another.

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I also want to thank Trish Roccuzzo who prepared this manuscript with her usual competence and creativity, which was no easy task.

To the best of my knowledge, all of the quotes in this book are from women (even the ones under men’s pennames). I ask the reader’s indulgence only occasionally when quoting a man’s research was too irresistible to leave out. Other than those few exceptions, this book represents a symphony of feminine voices. Many beautiful quotes are from the incredible collections of Rosalie Maggiot who has done a masterful job on her collections of the wise words of women.

Thank you to each and every one of you. You are all a very important part of these pages. It’s great to be alive with all of you.
Introduction

Women are many things to many people. The roles we play are of such fundamental importance that we, as a whole, can make or break society by how we play them. Women are relational beings, wired by evolution and destiny to nurture and sustain life. We carry those we love around in our lockets and in our hearts. So, when asked how we are, if we include in our answer a report on the state of our primary relationships and what those we’re connected to are up to, it doesn’t necessarily mean we’re nuts, pathological, or in need of treatment. We most likely are just being women operating how we operate.

Women are the keepers of a constant flame, keepers of the hearth; and if that flame blows out, society blows out. This is the secret that none of us are saying, the truth well-hidden right under our noses, where no one would think to look.

The real challenge for women is to maintain a sense of self while in connection with others. How do we do this?

In the 1950s we thought we had to give up a self in order to have others in our lives. In the 1960s and 1970s we thought we had to give up others to have a self. In the 1980s we thought we needed the trappings first—cars, houses, careers—and somehow a self would emerge. In the 1990s some of us began to realize that having it all isn’t necessarily having it all. . . .

Who are we, now that more doors are open to us? If we add
new roles, does it have to mean we forsake others? Do we have to become like men to succeed in a man’s world, or do we just stretch our hearts, hands, and days to include more? If we increase our life spans by thirty or so years due to advanced technology, can we now afford the luxury of having it all—as long as we don’t have to have it all in the same decade?

Research over the past three decades, spearheaded by the Stone Center of Boston, has revealed that women develop and self-define not according to the John-Wayne-lone-star model of tough autonomy, but in a relational, connected way. We women have our own special way of operating, our unique take on the world, our own *modus operandi*. We value relationships highly, not necessarily at the expense of self but in recognition that sustaining and nurturing relationships become part of our inner and outer lives.

When asked the question, How are you? our mothers may well have answered by telling how everyone close to them was BUT themselves. Today, we’ll tell you about those close to us AND ourselves. This is a subtle but huge movement. We have shifted from living on the periphery toward living at the center of our own lives. Periphery living doesn’t work. We envy those closer to the center. We develop resentments.

As women we have our own kind of strength. We draw wisdom from day-to-day experiences of the most ordinary kind. Our sense of place, meaning, and the worth of life is found not only from within but also in a context, tied to our biological role of holding and nurturing. Nature has charged us with a most awesome responsibility. If we stop drawing identity, wisdom, and a sense of purpose through being profoundly connected to self and others, we’re in trouble and so is our world.

With a predicted average of three extra decades added to our life span in the past century, we can work, wife, mother, grand-
mother, mentor, and still have time to spare. We can do what we’re so brilliant at: multitasking. We can adjust and be ingenious, flexible, and creative in our approach to living multiple roles.

In writing this book, I did a lot of reflecting on my own journey. Raised in the 1950s to the dream of wifehood and motherhood (a virgin if ever there were one), I suddenly found myself in the throes of the feminine revolution during the 1960s, a decade of new cultural markers. For the first time, we saw women out of the home and men in it (sometimes), women marching toward the workplace, bra-burning as a symbol of release from bonding, and women dressing for success in the workplace.

As women, we were redefining ourselves and challenging the roles we had played for centuries. The threat of pregnancy was removed by birth control and along with it the horror of being “knocked up” and left pregnant and alone. The workplace was no longer only a province of men. We could dream of being self-sustaining and having meaningful professions.

Then I found out that taking care of small children gives new meaning to the word work. Nothing could be harder. Or better. Or more rewarding, taxing, unnerving, and glorious. Then the real meaning of wifehood began to reveal itself, carving out an intimacy that is alive and terrifyingly close, creating with my husband a third entity called a relationship and sharing responsibilities for everything from a toothbrush to a life. And the need for a continued life passion became evident, sustaining a work that actualized my own talents, needs, and dreams and that allowed me to declare my space in the world and make a meaningful contribution to society.

So much role definition and redefinition stretches across these powerful decades, with such mythical meaning and importance, that women’s roles can really only be captured by archetypes. And the archetypes form complicated, interwoven
patterns. The Virgin has to become the Huntress and go after her life in the world. The Warrior is also the Mother who fights for her right to care for her children in a society that grossly undervalues the critical importance of motherhood.

We are the Huntress as we seed our children a bit at a time into society at large, the Martyr when we sacrifice our needs for theirs, and the Wise Woman in the way that we live our lives, raise our children, conduct our marriages, and shape our careers. The archetypes emerge in other ways too. As physician and author Christiane Northrup suggests, these qualities of womanhood are “stamped into our biology.” Many women who may never have children still mother in their workplaces, families, and communities every day, or, like Hestia, the goddess of wifehood, they faithfully keep the community hearth. The goddesses are, as Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., says, in every woman.

Some roles wax or wane over time, some overlap, some coexist nicely while others conflict. Some lie dormant, others become dominant, but each stage has its own developmental task. The Virgin’s task is to develop a sense of selfhood so that the Huntress, in touch with her gifts, strengths, and weaknesses can find her feet in the world, her life’s passion, and her own ground. The Warrior summons the strength and courage to meet the challenges and fight the battles that are a part of any woman’s life. She confronts her own dark side and gains power and wisdom from self-mastery. The Lover exposes her heart, her need for partnership, and calls out to the infinite to provide her with her soul mate. The Wife tends the hearth, creates a home, builds a safe and secure nest as an anchor and respite in this changing world. The Mother brings forth life, nourishing each little one in her charge until that little person can become self-sufficient and stand on her own two feet. Then the Martyr releases this
life into the world and returns to her empty nest to shed her tears and to find new ways to fill her soul.

Here is where the Wise Woman must take over because the tasks at this age are spiritual ones. She must find a deeper source of meaning by going within and by transcending the temporal life that surrounds her. “I have a body, but I am not only that body; I have a mind, but I am not only that mind. I am something infinite and beyond. I will shed the body one day, for it is only a container. I am not the bulb but the light that shines through it, and that light will never go out because it is spiritual in nature, as I am.”

The Wise Woman’s task is to dis-identify with the body and to identify with the deeper aspects of life. To find and create positive meaning and to pass that on to the generations that she will leave behind. To mentor, love, and teach by example. To reassure. According to Christiane Northrup, M.D., our brains and bodies are being rewired at this stage of life to encourage self-reflection and spiritual growth. The hormones that once wired us for nurturing and connection are rewiring us for attaining wisdom (see p. 354 in “Wise Woman”). Hormones that fostered caretaking behaviors are shifting or being rerouted to parts of the brain associated with resolving early painful memories and unfinished business while at the same time stimulating the pituitary gland, the “God spot” of the brain, the seat of wisdom, or the “third eye” as it is sometimes called. This means that a task at this age seems to be to resolve our pasts and become more spiritual.

Each well-completed stage becomes the foundation for all that follow. The stages intersect and interweave. They are ever present.

Ancient Greek women were very limited in the society in which they lived. They could not vote, own property, or engage
in business in most places. One of their few rights was to freely worship the goddesses. This was the arena in which they could expand into a greater sense of self, try on new roles, and move beyond convention. The rebirth of interest in goddess imagery may be allowing us, as modern women, to do the same. Understanding the archetypal meaning and significance of the roles we play allows us, too, to grow into more of who we are and explore who we can be.

Our journey through womanhood requires strength and courage. Living from our own center gives us a place from which to operate that makes sense, that allows us to be who we are so that we can allow those close to us to be who they are too. There is room for all when our souls aren’t being crowded out, when we can breathe and have our own source of oxygen.

The kind of selflessness, self-examination, love, and forbearance that is required by the roles that Mother Nature has asked us to play can also be a path toward spiritual renewal and ultimately our own freedom. We are woven into the web of life and we know it in our bones. This path ultimately can and often does lead to a kind of self-realization that women understand. It’s a quiet, private thing that we carry in our hearts.

The archetypes in this book represent roles along this journey. They also symbolize the interaction, growth, and comfort that can be had when the generations take care of each other throughout life. When the young give their freshness and vitality to the old and the old share their wisdom, care, and support with the young. We all need each other. This is “the village.” Our world may be expanding, but our basic needs have remained remarkably constant. It is our humanness that we honor and nourish when we play our roles well.
Modern society is pressing us to evolve. Our roles are transforming us as we move from one way of being toward another. It helps to understand this if we divide the process of transformation into three stages. According to Robert Johnson in his book *Transformation*, in the first stage, all is clear and simple; our roles are defined and happiness and satisfaction can be derived from playing them well. In the second stage, after the questioning has begun, all is in flux, examined, re-evaluated, and torn apart. We feel insecure as if the center isn’t holding. This is a vulnerable time . . . nothing is as it was, but where we’re going isn’t clear either. It can be exciting, challenging, scary, or all of the above. If we can get through this period of uncertainty, all can become simple again. Finally, in the third stage, we find ourselves re-integrating into what feels whole again, with aspects of our previous selves integrated into our newfound sense of who we are. We come to realize that happiness and satisfaction are found not only in playing our roles well but also in understanding their deeper meaning to our lives.

Once the questioning begins as it did in the 1960s, there is really no going back. Going back would be to adopt a somewhat superficial version of a role, repressing all that does not fit in. While before we were simply not conscious of what other possibilities there were, now we are aware of them, and the only path is to explore and experiment, to expand and reintegrate the whole of our vision, or to suffer the shadow, the hidden or suppressed part of us, asserting itself, creating pressure from within.

These past decades have surely been a time of expansion and experimentation. We have now had a generation to accomplish all of this complicated transition. The fruits of these labors are our own renewed selves, a new whole, and another way of being in the world. We’re doing our lives in some ways very differently
from our mothers and in some ways much the same. Other fruits are marriages infused with the vitality of equality and respect and a new way of operating that we can thrive in and pass on to our children. Today our daughters take for granted opportunities and challenges that we had to fight for. A new generation of balanced, responsible, brilliant young women with an emotional intelligence that seems to come naturally to them has emerged. We have a lot to be proud of.

**Intergenerational Living**

This book celebrates our multilayered lives. Imagine a family or a group of women occupying all the roles represented in these pages relaxing together around a kitchen table. What an enriching scene for all concerned. The energy and innocence of one generation interacting with the maturity and wisdom of the others, feeding each other, nourishing each other, the women interrelating to create a richer, better whole. And then envision all of the roles represented here being naturally internalized within each person present. This is not a vision of an ideal world. This experience is available here and now. All we have to do is look for it, recognize it, and work toward it.

The generations need each other. Countries where the old and young are cared for and venerated tend to be countries where we are of daily, practical use to each other. Grandparents play a strong role in the care and feeding of the young. The young provide security and a purpose for living for the aging generation, and those in the middle face the world and child rearing with significant support and an inbuilt sense of the “big picture.” In our affluent culture, where many of us can “survive” on our own, we have forgotten that our hearts and souls need nourishment as much as or more than our bodies.
It has been my thought that “dysfunctional” families, in part, are families that have not understood how to stay connected in a world that has been pulling us apart through technological and monetary advancement. Some of us have turned our pain at disconnection into alienation and defended against feeling our sense of loss by pathologizing distance. It has taken us a couple of generations to understand that airplanes go in both directions and to actively create ways of staying connected that work. Happiness does not begin “after the kids leave and the dog dies,” as the saying goes. That mentality reflects a cool detachment that misunderstands the need for connection throughout life.

Intergenerational living is nature’s design to provide for the needs of all the generations. Sequestering ourselves into what I call “peer ghettos” provides no role relief or cross-fertilization. People, like crops or flowers, need to cross over into each other’s worlds to stay healthy and strong season after season. Otherwise, we become nutrient poor.

I have written most of this book in the first person because it gives me an intimate connection with you, the reader, heart to heart. It also allows me to take psychological concepts and distill them into thoughts for the day that can be easily metabolized both psychologically and emotionally. Some of the experiences are mine and some are inspired by women I have worked with over the years. Complicated psychological concepts that are deeply personal and intimate by nature can be lost, I find, in language that feels too distant from the real self.

I recommend using this book in whatever way works best for you—go from back to front, start in the middle, leapfrog, open to any page, or journal in the margins. I see it as a bedside reader—personal and easy to pick up. It should work for any age. For young women it can provide support and inspiration and help them put their struggle to find their identity into words; for
women in the middle of their life tasks it can be a daily source of self-nurturing and thought alignment; and for older readers it can help them to consolidate, to feel more whole, and to move into the further inner challenges life holds. For every reader it should feel like an inner voice, I hope, a sort of heart friend. The idea is to create a positive sense of meaning and purpose. Because all life is really a journey of deepening our spiritual understanding and daily life is our vehicle, it seems fitting that this book is a daily reader. It has long been my experience that my clients who have a spiritual belief system—whether it be church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or Twelve Step work—heal better than those who do not have a way of both seeing spirit in the world and making deeper meaning out of the seemingly random events of our lives.

May your journey be rich and challenging and ultimately lead to greater expression of self, deeper appreciation of relationships, and the peace and harmony that passes all understanding.
The Virgin
Development of Self

After a while you learn
the subtle difference between
holding a hand and chaining a soul
and you learn
that love doesn’t mean leaning
and company doesn’t always mean security.
And you begin to learn
that kisses aren’t contracts
and presents aren’t promises
and you begin to accept your defeats
with your head up and your eyes ahead
with the grace of a woman, not the grief of a child
and you learn
to build all your roads on today
because tomorrow’s ground is
too uncertain for plans
and futures have a way of falling down
in mid-flight.
After a while you learn
that even sunshine burns
if you get too much
so you plant your own garden
and decorate your own soul
instead of waiting for someone
to bring you flowers.
And you learn that you really can endure
      you really are strong
      you really do have worth
        and you learn
        and you learn
      with every goodbye, you learn . . .

—Veronica A. Shoffstall
  “After a While”
The Virgin

I am the girl, the Virgin; the beauty within me is waiting to be born. I contain the seeds of womanhood waiting to burst into full and feminine expression. I am the Virgin whose innocence and beauty bring the tender blossoms of spring into this world. I am the bud on its way into full and glorious bloom. I sense within me the seeds of life itself. My heart is filled with longing and my mind rushes with the yet-to-be-fulfilled dreams of someday. I am preparing myself to bring forth life from my own body. I contain within my heart the promise of my lover yet to come and life yet to be born. We will carry forth the generations. I am a gift to this world.

I am a part of the universe’s life-giving force.

“See there within the flesh
Like a bright wick, englazed
The soul God’s finger lit
To give her liberty
And joy and power and love.”

—Mechtild von Megdeburg

“Love Flows from God”
Inner Search

Today I recognize that my life is lived through no one but me. I am the source of sustenance and strength that I am looking for. Within me lies all the beauty, strength, and wisdom it will take to create a self. I am my own best friend and my beacon in the storm. My light lives within, and I am the keeper of my own flame. I do not need to wait to be granted a self from some outside source. I will be the grantor. Accumulating accolades from outside in an attempt to establish an inner identity will not accomplish what I am hoping for. Ultimately, I will need to locate myself from within; the soul that I search for, I already have.

I am on a journey toward my soul.

“A soul is partly given, partly wrought.”

—Erica Jong
Fanny (1981)
Redefining Selfishness

Taking care of myself doesn’t have to mean that I am selfish. Taking care of myself is like putting the oxygen mask on myself first so I can breathe. Once I can breathe, I am able to cope with another person or situation effectively—without having to run, without gasping for air. Taking care of myself is a recognition that I am no good to anyone without a self. If I let my own sense of self disappear, I will inevitably try to replace it with another person’s or a substance or a false sense of self. I will cultivate the self that I care for. I need to go quietly into the interior of my own inner world. Self is there—waiting to be uncovered. It is when I lack a sense of self that I run away from those I love, physically or emotionally in search of something. Or I try to incorporate them into me to fill the emptiness. When I take care of my own self, I recognize the self of others and I allow them to take care of themselves with my blessing.

I look within for my true self.

“Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live; it is asking others to live as one wishes to live.”

—Ruth Rendell

A Judgment in Stone (1977)
Self-Acceptance

I accept myself as I am; this is no easy task. Constantly I find myself in internal bouts of self-criticism and self-doubt. I second-guess myself and doubt my ability to be up to the challenges of my life. Life can seem much more complicated than it did when I was a child. What does it mean to accept myself as I am? Does it mean that I stop growing and trying to be better or that I am arrogant and don’t feel I need to learn more in life? Or does it mean that I am enough for today, that life isn’t a race and that it is better for me and everyone around me if I can learn to take it a day at a time, to relax and enjoy the ride. Being hard on myself wounds the person I am closest to, me, and leads me to be hard on those around me. I teach others how to treat me by how I treat myself. Today I will begin to be fair and nice to myself and others.

I accept myself each day as I am.

“The world is terribly apt to take people at their own valuation.”

—Amelia B. Edwards

Half a Million of Money (1866)
**Self**

What is self and where do I find it? We all search for “self” because we sense that self is where we operate from, where we return to, and what sustains us. But what is it? Paradoxically we develop self both in relationships and in resting within. Our sense of self is highly impacted by those who raise us in both the nuclear and extended family and by the relational world of community and school that surrounds us. This is where we learn through the reflected appraisals of others how we’re seen. This is where we model and where we learn about relationships. We internalize all of this information and these impressions to form a working model of the world and of self. Secondly, we go within. We meditate. We contact that part of us that is unchanging and eternal. The steady reservoir of life itself as it dwells within us and we dwell within it.

*I go within for integration of my inner and outer selves.*

“The self is what we experience inwardly when we feel a relationship to oneness that connects us to everything outside us. At this spiritual level, ‘connecting’ and ‘detachment’ are, paradoxically, the same.”

—Jean Shinoda Bolen  
*Goddesses in Everywoman* (1984)
Shaping Myself

How do I shape myself today? Who am I—what will I become? In the turmoil of creating me, I sometimes get lost—lost to myself. Lost to others. When I tune in on my own voice, I cannot always hear the difference between my voice and the voices of others. I can feel confused, like I have too many messages in my head. Be this—don’t be that—so many messages it can be hard to mobilize my own energy and strike out on my own. I feel torn between missing where I came from and not knowing where I am going. At times I want to return to the safety of being a child and at other times I want to plunge into an adult life. I don’t always understand what is happening to me—it feels like there are so many MEs inside of me. Who will I be when I grow up? Will I ever know?

*I will be quiet enough to hear my own inner voice.*

“We make ourselves up as we go.”

—Kate Green

*If the World Is Running Out* (1983)
Self-Talk

How do I talk to myself? What do I say to myself when I make a mistake or fall short of expectations? Or how about when I’m looking for love or standing in front of a mirror? Am I my own worst enemy or my own best friend? Self-talk is what we say to ourselves on the inside. We need to pay attention to our own self-talk as we go through our day. Am I encouraging and compassionate with myself or critical and discouraging? If we don’t like what we hear, we can change it. Let’s try talking to ourselves the way we wish a wonderful friend or relative would talk to us. This may feel fake, but it’s as real as the negative talk we might be doing now—we just need to get used to it—to let ourselves hear what we really want to hear. People who are kind to themselves tend to be kind to others. Often, we treat those close to us the way we treat ourselves. Let’s treat ourselves well today. Let’s talk to ourselves with kindness.

I talk to myself in a supportive, encouraging voice.

“Beneath the surface of our daily life, in the personal history of many of us, there runs a continuous controversy between an Ego that affirms and an Ego that denies.”

—Beatrice Webb

My Apprenticeship (1926)
Journey Through Womanhood book. Read reviews from world’s largest community for readers. Women cultivate a sense of self through relationships, says Tian…Â Start by marking “Journey Through Womanhood: Meditations from Our Collective Soul” as Want to Read: Want to Read saving… Want to Read. Currently Reading. Read. Other editions. Enlarge cover. Our Slim Color-Block plant hanger is perfect to add a modern touch to any room in your home, office or creative space. This plant hanger seamless design can accommodate plant holders measuring anywhere from a 4” to 8” in diameter. Materials: 100% Recycled Cotton Cord Measures approximately 40â€ Long Please note that the finalâ€¦ Taylor Parker.