

"Every time you step in a pile of crap you work some of it into the ground, making it richer; making it possible for something new to grow."

The Myth of Chiron/The Reality of Ethics

By Debra Hurt

Abstract: The myth of the wounded healer, Chiron, lives on in each of us and requires of SK practitioners the honesty and integrity to meet our clients and our healing work in the truth of our wholeness, instead of in the disability and needs of our woundedness.

Myth: n. (Gk mythos) 1: a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon. 2: PARABLE. ALLEGORY.

Mythology: n. 1a: an allegorical narrative. 1b: a body of myths, esp. the myths dealing with the gods, legendary heroes of a particular people and usually involving supernatural elements. 2: a branch of knowledge that deals with myth.

Archetype: n. 1: the original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies: PROTOTYPE. 2: an inherited idea or mode of thought in the psychology of C. G. Jung that is derived from the experience of the race and is present in the unconscious of the individual.

We Embody Our Myths

Many of us think of myths and mythology as archaic fables from an earlier, simpler, more naive time. These are stories that we were forced to read as schoolchildren and promptly forgot. Yet we are surrounded by and are embodiments of myth. The myths of our cultures, the myths of our genders, the myths of our particular generations, etc. As I refer to myth and mythology throughout this paper it is as defined above by Webster's New

Collegiate Dictionary and should not imply in any way a judgment on the content of the myth or any belief about its authenticity or validity.

The myths of the past were transmitted orally as plays and songs, traveling to distant lands over the course of months or years as sailors and merchants carried them as part of their cargo on long tedious voyages. Today, we transmit our myths at lightning speed, moving them half way around the world by means of the telephone and the Internet.

Some of our myths are new; the response of the collective to the changes in our world due to technology and our relation to it. Consider a few of our current mythologies:

The Sovereign or Freemen movement in the United States. Individuals who fear the power of the government and strive to assert their independence from its influence.

UFO aficionados of all nations. This mythology is very complex and diverse in its application and includes its own characteristic bridging of past, present and future, including various creation myths. This mythology demonstrates the search for reason and hope from an outside, superior source that will either

teach us how to balance our relation to technology or bring the destruction that we deserve. (This varies with the different branches of the mythology.)

All of the major world religions. One adheres to a specific structure of beliefs that explains and/or justifies the current state of the world. Any conflict between the perception of the world as it is and the perception of the world as it should be within the religion's structure are overcome through the mechanism of faith.

The "Cheeseheads" of Green Bay, Wisconsin and elsewhere. This relatively recent myth of relatively few adherents centers around the Green Bay Packers football team. This myth encourages its adherents to strongly identify with the superior football prowess of the team and wear outrageous hats, disrobe and paint their bodies for display in sub-zero weather, and engage in bizarre hand movements and recitations.

The myriad New Age "light beings". This myth centers around the language of ascendance and encourages one to relate to the world through energy and light. This myth is especially dominated by a lack of darkness and a pre-occupation with expressing only one's "highest nature."

The myth of Consumerism. This myth is especially pervasive in the developed countries. Attainment is represented by material objects that are reputed to have various desirable qualities. These objects may make life easier, provide more leisure time, increase one's chances of finding love and affection, or provide a convincing experience of safety and security. Continued attainment requires continued consumption.

These are just a few examples of modern myths. We may feel drawn to one or more modern myths as an expression of our natures. For example, someone with a strong warrior nature is not likely to be drawn to the New Age movement. On the other hand, this individual may feel right at home in the Sovereign movement, the Cheeseheads cult or one of the world religions that has a more aggressive structure. Yet even if we aren't drawn to the specific qualities of certain of these myths or don't identify with or "believe" in them, they still carry important information or "reminders" for all of us.

The Sovereigns remind us to hold our governments accountable for their decisions and their use/abuse of power. The UFO fans expand our vision beyond our known world and remind us to be open to any possibility. The world religions provide us with many reminders: about our boundaries, our capacity for compassion, our need to focus outside ourselves. The Cheeseheads encourage us not to take ourselves so seriously and to have a little fun. The New Agers inspire us to realize our full potential and try to be the best we possibly can. The Consumers remind us that we live in the material world and may stimulate us to recognize that material can't last forever without responsible stewardship.

All of these myths and more are whispered to us by our parents, our cultures, peers from the moment we are born. Yet these are not the only types of myths that we experience from our births. Those ancient myths that we regard as curiosities are speaking to us, too, telling us the stories of the archetypes, the enduring qualities that make us human and that make us heroines and heroes of our own myths.

Now I'd like to tell you a story...

The Myth of Chiron

(Chiron--from the same Greek root as for the word "hand".) Kronos (also called Saturn) was out of favor with his wife, Rhea, because of his infuriating habit of consuming their offspring. Fed up with her husband's insatiable appetite, Rhea hid their infant son, Zeus, from his father.

Kronos was searching for his son when he happened upon his niece, Philyra the nymph, daughter of his brother Oceanus (also called Neptune.) Philyra dodged Kronos' amorous advances by turning herself into a mare and fleeing. Kronos likewise took the form of a horse and pursued her, finally overtaking and mounting her.

The issue of this odd "courtship" was Chiron the Centaur. *Chiron's initial wounding came at his birth.* His conception in the animal world and embodiment of animal drive and instinctual nature was evident in the lower half of his body--that of a horse. His birth to an immortal mother in human form and expression of human intellect and consciousness was evident from the hips up--that of a man. *In this we find Chiron's first wound; the wounding of the physical and the mental bodies.* An irreconcilable conflict is set in motion between them, each striving for supremacy over the other.

Chiron's father, Kronos, was by then long gone and--luckily for Chiron--ignorant of his existence. His mother was so disgusted at seeing what she had produced that she begged the gods to turn her into something else. They obliged by turning her into a linden tree. So Chiron came from what could safely be called a "dysfunctional family." Deserted by his father, rejected by his mother, *this is Chiron's second wound; the wounding of the emotional body.*

The abandoned Chiron is rescued by Apollo and raised by him as his foster son. Apollo, the Sun God, was also the god of medicine, hunting, riding, the arts, herbs, literature, archery and other martial arts and philosophy. All of these he taught to Chiron who was an ardent student. Under the tutelage of Apollo, Chiron sought to develop his human faculties and reason to their utmost. In fact, in Greek history, only Chiron and Pholus among the centaurs were able to exercise any degree of self- mastery.

Here we find Chiron's third wound; the mind successfully defeating the body. Chiron was described as "sage" and "friendly to men" by the chroniclers of his time. Some say that his animal nature also imparted to him the wisdom of nature, presenting only the benevolent rather than the destructive aspects of nature, in contrast to the other Centaurs. He was considered pivotal in the progression in the art of healing from the "occult to the rational school of therapeutics." 1

Chiron won the trust, respect and renown of many wealthy patrons in Thessaly in Northern Greece. He was given the sons of gods and princes to educate in the ways of "civilized manhood." Among his students were Jason, Hercules, Achilles and Asclepias. The Greek heroes and rulers learned what they knew of healing, poetry, song, the arts of combat, hunting and philosophy at his hooves.

He married the nymph Chariclo, had children and lived together with his family in a cave at the outskirts of human settlement.

Chiron was often present at celebrations and rituals given by his wealthy patrons and was always considered welcome by them. There are several accounts of *his fourth wounding*, most of them involving a party of some kind at which he and other Centaurs are present. In one account, the occasion is a wedding. The

wine flowed freely and the other Centaurs, all of whom had a hard time holding their liquor, became quite rowdy. Some of them became so audacious that they attempted to rape the bride! In the fight that ensued, Hercules drew his bow and shot an arrow--dipped in the Hydra's poison--at the Centaurs attacking the bride. In the chaos, it was Chiron whose leg was struck by accident before the arrow reached its mark.

Being immortal, Chiron could not die from his wound but the Hydra's poison had no antidote. He was forced to endure terrible pain. *This last wounding then, is the wounding of the spiritual bodies.* In his search for some way to end his agonizing pain, Chiron became a truly great healer. He amassed tremendous knowledge which he was able to use to increase his effectiveness in healing others, yet was unable to use on his own behalf.

By some accounts, Hercules made a case to the gods for Chiron to take Prometheus' place on Mount Caucasus where Prometheus was being punished for mocking Zeus and giving fire to mortals. Each day a vulture would come and rip out his liver and eat it. Each night he would grow a new liver and the torment would begin anew. He could only be released if someone offered to take his place. In order to take Prometheus' place, Chiron would have to give up his immortality. When presented with this choice, Chiron accepted and exchanged places with Prometheus, surrendering his immortality. He died and after nine days, Zeus transported him to the sky as the constellation Sagittarius.

Chiron and You

Think about how you came to be involved in Kinesiology. Chances are that Kinesiology became an important step on a journey already underway; a journey of healing or of self-discovery. *A desire to satisfy a perceived lack somewhere inside you -- that is the*

archetype represented by Chiron, The Wounded Healer.

Every character in the story also reflects possible ways in which we can allow ourselves to be seduced away from ethical behavior in our work, griefs that we carry, ways in which we hide from ourselves.

Kronos presents several possible choices. His devouring of his children represents the ways in which we sabotage our students or our clients when we allow our fears of being surpassed, or being left behind to take over and dictate our actions. His sense of entitlement in pursuing the unwilling Philyra and taking her against her will reflects our sense of "entitlement" when we take credit for our clients' efforts and wear our "success stories" like medals. His abandonment of Philyra and Chiron demonstrates the attitudes we indulge in when we justify a client's lack of progress with glib phrases like "You're obviously holding onto this..." in order to distance ourselves from what we perceive as a failure that might reflect on us adversely.

Rhea personifies our fears that when we do have new experience or develop an aspect of ourselves that our old patterns of reaction and behavior will arise and "devour" our growth.

In addition to portraying the "victim", Philyra also shows us what happens when we reject parts of ourselves; especially parts that we find difficult to face. In an effort to avoid her offspring, she is willing to give up human consciousness and movement. To what lengths are we willing to go to avoid confronting certain parts of ourselves?

Apollo is the light of intellect, creative expression, the abstract study of healing (Chiron is credited with being both the first practicing healer and the first botanist), ethics, the arts, and philosophy. Yet, though Apollo

is able to show intellectual interest in Chiron, he is unable to give and receive love. Apollo's romantic history is a complete disaster, implying an inability to blend the heart and the intellect. This teaches us to beware the pitfall of fascination with techniques at the expense of compassion.

Hercules is a complex character; the archetype of the masculine hero and the principle of domination that has both haunted and propelled Western Culture. (It may be no accident that there are proportionately more women in our field than men. But that's another subject...) He also represents the strength and individuality through which the "progress" of culture has been achieved. Hercules' own wounds are the death of his more timid, more moderate twin brother which condemned him to act out an increasingly one-sided, larger than life heroic figure (the Superman/Superwoman) and the wounding and subsequent agony of his revered mentor.

Prometheus is a trickster who shows contempt for authority. He expresses the desire for recognition, the attachment to our clients' progress, our renown interest in "cheating" god by taking credit for our clients' changes. His being chained to Mount Caucasus for his defiance of "divine law" echoes our own slavish attachment to material reality and our domination by our emotions and insecurities. He even has his liver removed daily. (Plenty of material to explore in that alone!) Perhaps Prometheus' most poignant message is in reminding us for the need of humility and compassion as a result of the knowledge gained through our own suffering.

Practitioner As Wounded Healer

These are the supporting players in the story of Chiron but what about Chiron himself? What significance does he hold for us as Specialized Kinesiologists? As men and women? Why am I bothering to tell you this story, anyway???

In a discussion of shamanism and the call to shamanism, Jeanne Achterberg makes several references to *the archetype of the "wounded healer."* As a cultural response to a "gender-related" wounding in Asia,

"...women on the outskirts of the Chinese family were the only ones that dared mediate with the ancestors, since they had very little to lose by engaging in such a fearsome task. When economic circumstances threw them back on their own resources, they used intuitive abilities in a supernatural application to 'dodge the vicissitudes of a male-dominant society.'"2

Wounding of the mind or emotions:

"A long-standing debate has existed in anthropological writings on whether shamanism is a shelter for deranged personalities."3

Wounding of the body:

"A person who survived smallpox, the most dreaded of all plagues, could live to walk among the ill and treat them with no fear of infection. Any brush with death from which a person emerged with knowledge of the encounter, as well as specialized immunity, should be a clear calling to healing."4

The most significant phrase in the previous quote is "from which a person emerged with knowledge of the encounter". The call to shamanism or healing then is not a random blunder but rather a quest or transformative experience in which one distills knowing from disaster.

And again wounding of the body,

"The prospective candidate's behaviors tend to indicate a greater than usual facility for using the imagination, and/or a miraculous ability to recover from significant illness--hence, the notions of the "divine illness" and the "wounded

healer" that are prevalent throughout the literature on shamanism."⁵

The Legend of Woundedness Continues

Chiron's story is a legacy out of an ancient culture that gives form and structure to our own current day struggles. The names have changed, but the wounds have not.

"Chiron's story underlines the need for acceptance of our woundedness as a precondition for any healing that may follow; it also shows how the wisdom of our own psyche may bring us healing in ways that we have difficulty receiving."⁶

One of the reasons we have difficulty in receiving it is that we have convinced ourselves that there is no wound there.

"Often (Chiron) represents things we can do well for others but cannot do for ourselves qualities which others perceive strongly in us but which we do not see. Often these are the very things which we urgently need for our own growth and healing, but they 'slip through' and are passed on to others."⁷

His conception was the product of coercion and deceit. He was unrecognized by the masculine and repulsed by the feminine. He was in the world but not of it. His education, even though it encompassed the arts (and both typically masculine and feminine pursuits) was presented as a rational, linear discipline. He battled throughout his life to control his body, his desires and his instinctual drives by developing his mind.

His primary occupation was the development of young men, one of whom delivered unspeakable pain through an art taught to him by the same mentor that he wounded. He sought relief from what he knew best, and though many benefitted from his efforts, for him it was inadequate. The agent of his wounding negotiated his release from

suffering. He relinquished his birthright and found peace. Any of this sound familiar?

Ethics and The Healing of Our Wounds

We have all had one or more of these experiences. We may relate to them as traumatic--even devastating, as "character building", as something that happened once upon a time, or a dim, vague feeling.

Whether conscious or unconscious, vivid or dim, traumatic or indifferent, these wounding experiences shape our self concepts and how we relate to the world. This especially includes our mores and ethics. We may feel "entitled" to do certain things that we would consider "wrong" if others did them simply because we feel we've earned the "right" because of our wounding. We may compromise our integrity without realizing what we are doing because on some level we "feel better" when we indulge in certain feelings, thoughts or activities.

Our wounds represent that which we will protect at any cost -- we've spent many years developing ways to protect them, from exposure, from further pain. And we may protect them even to the extent of ethical abuses of very subtle kinds. Our challenge is to become an active observer of the blend of the instinctual animal nature and the rational human consciousness--the drives of the body and the exaltations of the Soul--all of which provide the battleground of the emotions.

Our wounds can lead us into questionable acts by activating our devotion to pet beliefs or limitations. It feels good to receive recognition, to be "seen," to be "heard." What could be wrong with working hard so that we can have that feeling again and again? Maybe nothing, maybe much. How can we know what the effects are if they remain unexamined or simply unconscious?

Carl Jung addressed it this way:

"Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed and injured by the other. If they must contend, let it at least be a fair fight with equal rights on both sides. Both are aspects of life..and the chaotic life of the unconscious should be given the chance of having its way too--as much of it as we can stand. This means open conflict and open collaboration at once. That, evidently, is the way human life should be. It is the old game of hammer and anvil: Between them the patient iron is forged into an indestructible whole, an "individual."8

The individuality, the respect we win within ourselves can then be supported and respected in our clients as autonomous beings themselves.

So what can we do and why should we bother? Again from Jung, "That which we do not bring to consciousness appears in our lives as fate."9 We must seek to consciously relate to and understand all that we can about the wounds that we carry so that we don't we don't have to continually reactivate and relive them.

What we come to terms with we don't have to keep being "slapped" by and in turn "slap" others with. These others can be our parents, our partners, our children and especially our clients, with whom we don't have the same emotional ties.

"That is why in seeking for the meaning of your suffering you seek for the meaning of your life. You are searching for the greater pattern of your own life, which indicates why the wounded healer is the archetype of the Self--one of its most widespread features--and is at the bottom of all genuine healing procedures."10

Committing ourselves to the process of inner exploration and identification of the archetypal images we carry reveals how

"the basic human psychological structure is formed. We might think of them as the natural blueprints that dictate the shape of our inner mental structures, or the basic molds that determine our instinctual roles, values, behavior, creative capacities, and modes of perceiving, feeling and reasoning."11

This is the discovery of our primary wounds and the primary ways in which we wound others--both deliberately and by chance. Once discovered, the nature of the wounds themselves may suggest or even dictate their remedies.

This is an internal, personal journey in which there is great risk and great reward involved. Yet there is no need to be afraid. Don't you watch people undergo this process almost every day? Don't you sometimes act as a guide for those who choose to make expeditions through their inner landscapes to come to terms with their own unique imagery, mythology and wounding? Don't you deserve the same? Don't your family members, friends and clients deserve to be released from holding up your mirror for you? Until we can identify our primary wounds and begin to remedy them we are blind to the greatest threats to our ability to behave ethically with our peers, students and clients.

Honesty and Integrity Lead to Healing

Of course Kinesiology can be an effective means for initiating this inner exploration, but there are myriad other possibilities as well. Even the remedies of Chiron's own time can be effective: ritual, song, herbs, prayer, poetry and observing one's dreams. Very effective is a period of daily reflection or meditation in which one can contemplate one's actions and words. Our expectations of honesty and

integrity in others are continually bombarded by our diminishing cultural values. We must guard against lowering our expectations of our own honesty and integrity.

Discipline is the focusing of power. Self-mastery is the integration of the whole and wounded parts of the Self with and through all our means of perception. When we combine discipline and self-mastery in service to the creative source, like Chiron, we are released from suffering and find peace. And ethical behavior becomes effortless.

**Our friends show us what we can do,
Our enemies teach us what we must do.**
-- Goethe

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Footnotes

- 1 Jayne, Walter A., MD. *The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilizations*, p. 360.
- 2 Achterberg, Jeanne. *Imagery in Healing*, p. 20.
- 3 *ibid*, p. 20.
- 4 *ibid*, p. 22.
- 5 *ibid*, p. 21.
- 6 Reinhart, Melanie. *Chiron and the Healing Journey*, p. 28.
- 7 *ibid*, p. 26.
- 8 Zweig, Melanie and Jeremy Abrams. *Meeting the Shadow*, p. 117.
- 9 *ibid*, frontispiece.
- 10 Reinhart, p. 30.
- 11 Johnson, Robert A. *Inner Work*, p. 28.

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