

Psyche and Eros....A Myth for women and men

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The practice of hypnotism can be more than the routine use of scripts and techniques that were judiciously learned when initially studying to become a hypnotist. Some hypnotists never grow while others excel. And, there is a very good reason for this. We become so comfortably stuck in the repetition of our routines that we fail to take the time to capitalize on the time that we have with our clients. We must stimulate ourselves to think about what a client is. Most of our clients are human beings (I think) so we must look at them as women, men or gay. By no means should we consider ourselves psychologists or psychiatrists but we have the right to consider what makes men and women 'tick' in general. When I was younger and dumber, I thought that the only difference was physical, and now that I am older and less dumb (I think) I have discovered what a 'work of art' women truly are. In a cable television career interview the other day, I was asked what a good age would be for a person to begin a career as a hypnotist. My answer was that we, as practicing hypnotists, not only use what we have been taught in hypnosis classes but that we draw upon our own life experiences when working with clients and are very careful of the things that we say to them, for a client hinges on every word of the hypnotist much the same as a patient hinging on every word of a medical doctor. A client comes to a hypnotist for help and we must continually improve on what we do regardless of our ages. We owe this to our clients without reservation. Can a 21 year old bring 35 years of experience to the office? I think not. However, we can draw upon our reading to gain insights into the subconscious minds of women and men. We know that the venerable Milton Erickson conveyed insights to his patients through the use of healing metaphors. Dr. Erickson's daughter, Betty Alice Erickson, wrote me two years ago after reading one of my articles ('The Lies I Tell') in the Journal of Hypnotism, that every 'healing metaphor' that her father told his patients was true. I think that it is important to share her knowledge with you. Please pay particular attention to the last paragraph relative to our strengths. These are excerpts of what she wrote to me on February 18, 2008:

"I am Milton H. Erickson's daughter, a retired teacher and a practicing psychotherapist, published author and international teacher of his work for over 20 years. Dad worked with me as a subject from the time I was 11 years old until his death. I have a broad expanse of knowledge of his work. A great deal of your article is absolutely accurate and has ideas that many people do not "get." I like your phrase that our unconscious is "truly the most honest part of us" ... despite... . That whole paragraph is a different, and as far as I am concerned, an accurate assessment of one whole and vitally important segment of the unconscious.

To another point. You say "The venerable Dr. Milton Erickson ... surely (he) was a concocter of lies to create the healing metaphors." When I was a teenager (note the word 'teenager' with all that implies) I also wondered how Dad could come up with such a variety of wonderful stories that so often helped people. As I matured, I began to understand they were all true. Here is my 'handy-dandy' rationale. While we are all infinitely different, there are a finite number of themes in life. By adulthood, we have experienced a large number of those themes. An effective healing metaphor, as you know,

deals with the relevant theme.

When a hypnotist is also in a trance, a powerful way to induce trance, he/she also accesses unconscious resources. Therefore, if I am in a trance, listening to you, I will also hear you on an unconscious level. My unconscious is able to go through the catalog of my experiences and presents ideas, stories, similar experiences. Then it is easy to craft a healing metaphor."

The messages were indirect so to speak but nevertheless extremely powerful. When we were kids we studied history in school to learn all the facts of our heritages and we have the opportunity to learn about how women and men think, act and react through the reading of various myths...for a very simple reason...the messages that a myth conveys are always true regardless of the decade or century of the reader and humans living at the time. I have found that the telling of a myth or just a few ideas of the myth to various groups in women's organizations, at hypnosis conventions, and to certified addictions counselors has been well received. I use myth in my relationship work, and in the sessions when warranted, and absolutely feel and know that when I tell the myth of Psyche and Eros in groups that although it is about the strength of a woman, the men in the audience learn a bit more about the opposite sex and walk away in a pretty good frame of mind. I have adapted this myth from the little book of Robert A. Johnson, entitled "She-Understanding Feminine Psychology" . I am indebted to the enlightenment that the devouring of this little book gave me 20 years ago.

Long ago, in a land far away and near, there was born to a royal family, a girl with indescribable beauty and grace. She had two sisters who were married to kings and lived luxurious lives. It has been said that she was born of raindrops falling on the earth, that she was mortal, indeed of the earth. In this land, the Goddess of Beauty, Aphrodite reigned for untold years. She was born on ocean waves and signified the depth of women and also the underworld, the unconscious. Men and women paid homage to her by besieging her with rare and incredible gifts that befit her stature, and beseechingly served her needs from the top of her radiant hair to the pale skin on the under part of her foot. She was the embodiment of many attributes of women, while also being representative of a dark side. She was kind and gracious to her followers; she was concerned about their well-being. Peace and serenity presided over her goddessdom until the birth of the mortal beauty, Psyche, the name which translates to "soul." Humble, mortal beauty from that time on has always been a threat to goddess-like beauty. Over the years through the development of Psyche, the former worshippers of Aphrodite began flocking to Psyche to serve her as the mortal queen of beauty. Aphrodite steamed and pouted to the degree that her palace was not a very nice place to be. Many times, when the person that is at the head of a particular setting, becomes ill, angry or miserable, the setting and the inhabitants suffer. The entire environment becomes shabby and run-down. Such was the case at this palace. She stewed and planned and then ordered the oracle of Zeus the highest god and therefore, the most revered oracle, to tell the parents of Psyche that she was to marry Death. The citizens of the faraway, near land all believed the words of oracles as absolute, so the parents were distressed and saddened but nevertheless, were compelled to prepare their daughter for this wedding, this

hopeless and hideous marriage to Death. (How many of our clients seek the advice of Psychics and live parts of their lives in guided by the session statements?) (How many parents think that the intended husband of the daughter is death reincarnated or even worse?)

The wedding march was organized, and Psyche, with head down, ploddingly proceeded to the top of the mountain to await her spouse. Those who accompanied her were not celebrants but mourners who filled the way with tears as if in a funeral procession. Does not that youthful and maiden-like quality die at marriage physically and psychologically? Is there not this form of death in every marriage or intimate relationship? Psyche shed no tears and asked her parents not to be sad now, for the true sadness was 'before, when she was alone, due to the fear of rejection that was instilled in the hearts of would-be suitors by the enormity of her beauty. (We have heard comments like this on and off from some of the most beautiful women in the world) Her parents chained her to the top of the mountain to await certain death, and the entire procession returned to town. Psyche waited and waited, but death was not forthcoming. The death of parts of a woman at marriage are far overshadowed by love and the birth of a two-into-one relationship so that any feelings of loss of youth and maidenhood are expelled from consciousness. Although Psyche had never cast eyes on her eventual mate, the seeds of marriage relationship were unwittingly being planted by Aphrodite, the arch enemy of Psyche. Aphrodite was to become furious and extremely impatient as she received reports that Psyche had not been visited by Death. She called upon her son Eros, the God of Love, to obey and assist her. The common name for Eros is "Cupid" the Valentine cherubim; however Eros was anything but that. He was handsome. He was the dream-man of every (past and present) woman's fantasy. Aphrodite ordered him to go to the top of the mountain and prick Psyche with one of his arrows so that she would fall terminally in love with Death. He hastened there and accidentally touched his skin with one of his own arrows while catching first sight of Psyche. He immediately fell *in* love with her as he was not immune to the power of his arrows, the power of love. (How many real-life stories have you heard or movies that you've seen with the theme of antagonism at first, which turns to love and marriage after a period of time?) He quickly summoned his friend, the West Wind, to gently lift Psyche to the valley below. Nestled in this valley was a palace that paled all mortal palaces, for Eros was the son of Zeus and Aphrodite. Psyche could not believe the splendor of the palace and its gardens she eagerly awaited her host, whom she had not yet seen. That night, in the dark, Eros visited the bed of Psyche and the union of a god and a mortal was passionately consummated. Psyche was irreversibly in love with Eros as if she, herself had been touched by one of his arrows. He extracted a promise from her that she would refrain from looking at him as he was a god. If she kept this promise, all would be as ecstatic and as pleasurable as that evening. Psyche promised and that evening was repeated with heightened pleasure, night after 'night. How many women have been asked by their men to permit them some mystery, some liberty? How many men do not desire to have women know them completely? How many women have been promised paradise by their men? Paradise is ever changing and cannot exist in the same form, ever. He promised her a paradise and he delivered her a

material one. But, there can be no paradise built by another that can endure. It is you that creates the permanence of paradise, and remember that paradise cannot be perfect, because perfection can only be attained in the Kingdom of God. (It would so great if we could convey this message to ourselves and to our clients) Some promises early in marriage and of an evening, may become quite difficult to keep. Such was the case with Psyche, who began having self-doubts. Her two sisters represent these self-doubts of the inner world and also personify those who would trick and jealously mislead a young, happily married woman in the outer world. Do you know any woman who *is* suffering from inner thoughts and outside influences? The sisters learn of Psyche's marvelous rescue and overwhelming good fortune, so they visit the mountain looking for her. They spot her in the valley garden below and ask to visit her. Psyche respects her man (god), and requests permission for their visit. He warns her of this folly but she would not be denied and love compels him to accede to her wishes.

The sisters visit Psyche and begin discussing her mate as is done every second somewhere in this world. You've done it many times, haven't you? Psyche describes Eros in a scintillating fashion; her imagination runs wild for she is not limited by as much as a fleeting glance of him. The jealous sisters go away disgruntled, their very skin turning green, and vow to return, which they do, in spite of Eros' repeated warnings. This time Psyche describes Eros differently than the first time and when the sisters leave their skin blossoms with anticipated conquest. The third time they visit Psyche, they tell her that she *is* truly married to the monster, Death. How many marriages and relationships have been severed by gossip and malicious people, who, after the ashes of separation or divorce settle, are still with their significant other and not alone while their targeted "sister" is in an utter state of panic and misery? Wow, good, true, meaningful and sincere advice is so hard to find, that we should be cautious when hearing it. Often, strangers give better advice than people that we know. The sisters convince Psyche to bring a knife and lamp to bed with her that evening and while she and he are locked in an embrace, she should light the light, sight the monster and bring death to Death. She complies and when Eros gently presses his body to hers and whispers his love, she lights the oil lamp, sees a god, and shakes the lamp uncontrollably, wounding Eros with the spilled oil. The lamp represents the light of knowledge which ultimately leads to good although the road may sometimes be rocky. The knife represents bad, as it is a tool of severance, of destruction. Psyche used only the lamp, and her knowledge of his true nature and mistrust wounded her lover who immediately returned to the most natural, earthly and godly refuge. Yes, you've guessed it.... his mother, Aphrodite. Psyche is in despair and in panic. She seeks the help of many gods and is turned away by all but one, Pan, the God of Panic (among other things). Panic kindly advises her to pray to love and when she does, she learns that she should seek aid from her dreaded mother-in-law, Aphrodite. This advice appears harsh, but can be paradoxical, for when change is sincerely sought, that which wounded you, may be instrumental in your healing. All self-help groups maintain that the addiction or problem that sent you there, has provided you with the opportunity to maximize your character assets and eliminate your character defects to transform you into a new and better person. So, Psyche

goes to Aphrodite and pleads to be re-united with Eros. Aphrodite is still smarting over Psyche's beauty and the fact that she took away her son, from the mother who was the most beautiful goddess in the universe. She promises to re-unite the pair if Psyche can perform four impossible tasks to Aphrodite's satisfaction. Mothers-in-law can be excruciatingly' hard task-masters, but if the daughter-in-law overcomes imposed obstacles, she gains enormous growth that may not have been the intended design of the mother-in-law. It surely would not be the intended design of the addiction. (The same myth may apply to many situations, and subject to different psychological meanings. This is the "beauty" of myth. Although this myth has been selected for relationships and love , parts of it can readily be applied to the relationship of addiction) These are the four assigned tasks:

Aphrodite brings Psyche to ground covered with many different types of seeds and instructs her to place them in individual piles, type by type. Psyche is beside herself and ready to end it all when along comes an army of ants who expeditiously make neat piles of the seeds. After I had narrated this version to a class, a Russian student (psychologist) raised her hand and gave the version that she had learned in Russia: That the army of ants gave spirit to Psyche by singing a song and cheering her on while she, herself performed the task, and not the ants. The Russian version is stronger and I prefer it. Nevertheless, it is the feminine aspect of the Psyche which sometimes, when confronted with a seemingly insurmountable situation, must sit down and cry, if she will, become rooted to the earth and then sort out things and recent happenings for herself. Just stop and the answers will come, and do not think it strange when an unsuspected source of help and strength like the ants, wanders into your desperation. Aphrodite bit her lip into white fury at the accomplishment of this feat and then, coldly assigned the next task. Psyche was to cross a river to the land on the other side which was the home for magnificently dangerous rams of golden fleece. She was to shear and gather a sufficient amount of golden fleece so that a proper garment could be woven for Aphrodite. Psyche cried and sobbed for she knew that she would be torn to pieces by the rams' horns if she attempted to shear their fleece. She was again ready to end it all and went to the river bank to throw herself in. At the edge of the land and the beginning of the water {consciousness and unconsciousness, the known and unknown}, stood waving reeds who whistled to her that she could safely fleece the fleece from the rams. She had only to wait to nightfall so that the rams could not see her, and then gather the fleece which had caught on the brambles and bushes. She readily performed the gathering of the fleece. The rams represent masculinity, and Psyche was warned that woman should not meet man head-on; sometimes, man's masculinity must be left alone. How many of you have accomplished exactly what you wanted by not taking your man head-on? Some may even say that there is more than one way to skin a cat, or to de-fleece a ram. Aphrodite dejectedly accepts the fleece and spittingly assigns the third task.

Psyche is to go to the river Styx which rides to the mountain crests and spills back down into the core of the earth in an ever circling motion. There she is to fill a pure glass goblet full of its water. The river signifies life in the loftiness of the mountains and death in the depth of the earth. Vicious animals guard the shores of the river and

Psyche again despairs over the performance of the task. She cries in desperation, but an eagle in all of its masculinity, snatches the goblet from the hands of Psyche and gracefully fills it with the water of Styx. A full goblet, no more, no less, a drink of life sufficient to sustain, a taste of enough power, but not too much, is ideal. Aphrodite fumes again and assigns the most devilish of tasks. Psyche is to go to the underworld, to Hell, to the unconscious, and ask the Queen of Darkness, of Mystery, of the Underworld, for a box of her beauty secret. This is a journey that no one should be compelled to make for there is no promise of return. Yet, if a person goes to Hell and returns, she or he has the reward of elevation and growth, and in some cases, the ultimate state of serenity. Psyche was promised this in the form of Eros, of love. Again she despaired, but continued on. She saw a high tower (Higher Power?) and realized that the task was too much for her; she approached it to fling herself from its heights. The tower appeared larger and larger and she heard a faint song being sung by the tower. The closer she came to her Higher Power (high tower?) the clearer the message of the song became. Psyche was to take on her journey two barleycorn cakes and two coins with the strict admonition that she was not to dally nor have her energy tapped by anyone or anything. It was crucial that she preserve all of her energy for the rigors of the journey and for herself. This advice was strange to Psyche for she always was concerned about humanity but she had faith in the source of the advice. She did not know at that time that when a person is on a life and death journey, presently taken by many, nothing can impede or alter the path of the journey. This must be done by yourself and for yourself, only. There are journeys in our life in which we need all of our strength and it may be better not to share what is being undertaken so that all energy is preserved and no other person's thoughts or actions weaken us. We must always be aware of 'Energy Vampires' She goes to the River Styx and comes upon a man and donkey in distress, but does not offer help, as difficult as this refrain is. When she comes to the river there appears a ferryboat and its operator to whom she gives one of the coins for passage payment. During the crossing she sights a drowning man whom she also cannot help. Some drowning people, some slipping addicts, some unhappy persons, have the tendency and capability to take you down with them, (especially when we are weak with occurrences and incidents in our lives), and she was so weak with stress and so forlorn and lovesick, that she surely would have perished in the water with them had she offered a hand. At first, she hesitated for she felt that this was cruel, then she was filled with the knowledge that nothing would be served for her to perish along with the drowning man. She had to conserve her energy, her strength for the impossible, or what she thought impossible when she took the first step of this journey. Upon arriving at the shore she came to a three headed dog, who would surely chew her to pieces, but she throws one of the barleycorn cakes to the heads who fight each other so viciously that she slips by. Have we ever seen a person that is so busy fighting with himself or herself that not only Psyche, but the whole world and life, itself, can slip by? At times we must all calm our three heads, even if its only with the thought of a barleycorn cake. Psyche then descends into Hell with its stagnant air and a dimness of desperation and futility. She sees only masses and masses of pairs of eyes which bleed through the dimness to reveal their languor. I have been there. I have seen their eyes, the eyes tell all. At the bottom of the stairs stands the Queen of the Night, the Queen of the Underworld, Persephone, who invites Psyche to feast with her. Psyche saw a

banquet table so large that it completely occupied the backside of Hell. Every worldly food was temptingly displayed and fit for a god. When Psyche turned to speak to Persephone, from the corner of her eye, she caught a rare glimpse of the underworldly things in worldly garb which were really on the table.

A flash instantly swelled from the pit of the stomach and reverberated in the top of her head. She became aware that if one accepts the hospitality of the Queen of Darkness, for any purpose (especially with addictive substances or behavior, or negative thinking) that it is nigh impossible to leave the Underworld (or the addiction) . Because of this refusal of hospitality, Persephone permitted Psyche to leave with a box of her beauty secret and bids her well. Psyche throws the other barleycorn cake to the three headed dog very easily this time for she had the practice of the first calming, smilingly slips by and pays the ferryboat man for the return ride with the second coin. (Once a difficult task, difficult thought, concept or understanding is learned, it makes the same or similar tasks or thinking easier to perform. Psyche relaxed upon reaching the shore of the world and became complacent. (Complacency is always our enemy) The tower's warning not to open the box was soon forgotten or unable to be heeded through curiosity. She opened the box and found what appeared to be nothing contained therein, but that nothing cast her into a deadly sleep. The box of addiction also contains nothing but deadly sleep and lost time. However, if the nothing contents of the box can be understood, if a person can understand the inner self that has been in that dark box until opened, he or she can learn the secret of life. Curiosity has felled many a man and woman, the recognition of which is part of the foundation for a move towards self and serenity. The path to healing has been opened. Eros has been watching the entire journey of Psyche and knows that she has performed admirably and that the earlier mistrust and later curiosity must be dashed from memory. He had enough of the torture of his goddess-like psyche. He pleads for recognition of the virtues of Psyche to his father, Zeus, who agrees to permit Eros to awaken Psyche by touching her with one of his arrows, with love. Psyche opens her eyes to Eros, to love, to herself and joyously takes the box to Aphrodite, who not only approves of the formal marriage of Psyche and Eros, but is actually happy with the transformed, mature and empowered psyche. There is a regal palace wedding which is attended by all of the gods and goddesses of the Universe. Zeus blesses the marriage and shortly thereafter Psyche gives birth to a baby girl, who is promptly named "Pleasure."

Again, my sincere thanks to Betty Alice Erickson for her kind and sharing letter about her father, Dr. Milton Erickson, and to Robert A. Johnson for his recognition of the inner feelings and outer actions of women.

CAVEAT: In strict compliance with the Ethics & Standards of our profession, always advise your clients who demonstrate symptoms of medical issues or psychological disorders to avail themselves of the best allopathic medical and psychological professional services that they can obtain. Request a written referral when warranted. Hypnotism is complementary to these traditional disciplines.