

A FEMININE
ANSWER
TO CRISIS

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THE STORY THE WORLD NEEDS NOW

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To all women and men
who found the courage
to walk this path.

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Tree of Life Foundation

Connecting the Dots

*'Only when the last tree has died,
the last river has been poisoned,
and the last fish has been caught,
will we realize that we cannot eat money,
a Native American teaching says.*

The night is darkest before the dawn. In that deep darkness, we need the feminine principle – the capacity to deeply confront and profoundly heal. We need her to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed. We need her to reconnect us with the origins of life, and if needed carry us compassionately through the portals of death. But above all, we need her to hold the faith and make that one big leap that we are most frightened of: the leap into the unknown. Because that is the only way to discover the new.'

A Feminine Answer to Crisis, p. 209

PREFACE

Even the most optimistic among us must admit it: we are facing a wide range of crises today. (Geo)political, financial, ecological, technological, ethical... I guess there is not one societal or even personal field that is unaffected by the rollercoaster of events we are currently in. The world as we knew it no longer exists, and is changing so rapidly that we can hardly keep pace. In our attempt to move forward while creating solutions for the challenges ahead, we even expose ourselves to the danger of self-annihilation as a human species. Is this really the future we want to create? And is this old way of coping really the way we want to tackle the crises we are in?

Historically we tend to solve societal crises in a masculine way. We react rationally, by imposing measurements, regulations, laws. Top down. We solve problems superficially in the hope that the show can go on – and suppress disturbing symptoms that tell us otherwise. When things really get bad, we identify an enemy that we can furiously fight, or we provoke a war. ‘After destruction, comes rebuilding,’ I guess that’s the reasoning. So, let’s destroy the enemy. Problem solved. Or so we think. The human pain we caused by this destruction, is considered collateral damage, and we naively hope that oppression will not take its revenge in a devious way, and come back to us. How much are we willing to destroy? And what do we think this eternal division and fight will lead to – knowing that our crises become increasingly global?

As a woman I watch this evolution with growing disbelief – and alarm. What are we doing? What is this heading to? Every cell in my body is telling me: stop. This cannot go on. Sooner or later, we will have to accept that we are trying to subdue

monsters that have become too big for us to defeat, and that the solutions we are suggesting are sucking life out of all of us. Sooner or later, we will have to admit that no-one *really* knows what we are heading to – even the ones who think they do. And we will have to acknowledge that, if we want to create a livable future for the next generations, we will have to radically turn the wheel. But what does this mean?

In this book I am taking you on a journey – the personal journey I experienced between 2020 and 2023, leaving my old life behind and stepping into the big unknown. While at that time the world was being guided through a global crisis by a strong paternal voice, I found myself being led in a completely different direction – one that I can only describe as *the feminine way*.

This challenging journey made me realize that, in times of crisis, we need more than the well-known effective masculine qualities of leadership, vision, action, determination, and clarity. We also desperately need less familiar and appreciated, yet profoundly powerful feminine qualities. Like the ability to accept the unknown and enter the mystery. The strength to hold space for discomfort and to endure periods of decay and emptiness, before giving birth to the new. The power to connect and collaborate as one body, and to heal the pains that we have been carrying for generations. But also, the mystical reconnection to the soul and to a reality that is bigger than our egos. And the ability to dream and create from the heart.

When fear of unknown territory and fear of the feminine push us to overemphasize traditional masculine strategies when dealing with crisis, leadership becomes unbalanced and even toxic. Instead of healing the roots of a crisis, we risk amplifying the pain. Instead of finding new solutions, we tend to blindly rely on the very thinking that is at the root of our systemic crisis. And in doing so, we may miss the opportunity as a

culture – and as humanity – to involve into a new chapter of our history.

If we want to change the course of events, we will have to turn our compass. Decisively and courageously. I know no-one has the full truth, nor the one solution, but am willing to share my viewpoint, as a Western woman and journalist who has been observing the world for decades. And I am willing to share a range of essential, yet forgotten feminine qualities that I discovered on my personal journey. Qualities that – facing a systemic crisis – we will *all* need, if we want to make it safely to the other end.

I know parts of this story are unconventional. The deep feminine is. The stranger the story might sound, the more I hope you understand how far we distanced ourselves of an important and deeply human part of our psyche that we absolutely need in challenging times. My hope is that many of you – and especially new, young leaders – will feel inspired to trust, develop, and embody these qualities, balancing them with healthy, empowering masculine ones – because we absolutely need these too. We have to develop both assets to face a crisis: masculine and feminine. Only then can we draw on the fullness of our human potential – and not just half of it – to navigate one of the most challenging periods in history that we may ever experience. Only then will we be able to dream and create a future that will benefit our children.

INTRODUCTION

I looked at the cards in front of me. On the left lay the card that revealed what would happen if I continued the job I was doing. On the right, the card that showed what awaited me if I chose to leave. The left card promised depression and burnout. The right predicted a complete collapse of my existing foundations – the disappearance of the very structures that no longer served me – so that I could rebuild on solid ground. I chose the right.

When you recognize that the place you are in no longer nourishes you and that real change is needed, you have two options. You can resist until the strain weakens you physically and mentally, until you become ill – or worse. Or you can surrender to the current of life and allow it to carry you towards an unknown future. That was the experiment I embarked on over the last few years, the moment I decided to resign from my role as editor-in-chief of *Psychologies* magazine and store my furniture with friends so I could leave my home and belongings behind. I desperately needed to regenerate, so I took a few months' sabbatical and, with that choice, let go of all financial security. To make matters even more overwhelming, my father – my lifelong anchor – passed away the day before I moved out of my house. Talk about having my foundations shattered. And that was only the beginning. What I expected to be a brief digital-nomad adventure – traveling through Western Europe in a camper van with my partner Ton in search of a fresh start – turned into more than three years on the road. All of it during the covid era.

In hindsight – now six years later – I can see that what I went through was a micro-version of what the world is now

experiencing on a larger scale. We are collectively in a state of exhaustion, and challenged to re-evaluate and fundamentally change our assumptions – as a culture, as a civilization, as a species. We are confronting not one, but many crises calling us to let go of the old, endure the upheaval of transformation, and face a new beginning.

The masculine paradigm we have relied on for millennia – a worldview grounded in separation, individuality, logic, survival of the fittest, competition, structure, control mechanisms, and paternal leadership – is weakening. It is becoming increasingly challenging and is collapsing under its own weight. It has reached the end of its strength. The world is shifting rapidly, and that shift is shaking our foundations to the core. We are losing control over what we once knew. We feel the chaos and uncertainty and ask ourselves endless questions. We know we must create a better future, but we don't know what it will look like or how to reach it. We don't know the path, nor the destination. Multiple solutions are being proposed, and we fight each other trying to impose our own survival strategies onto others, hoping for the best. But in truth, no one *really* knows.

What struck me most during my own 'experiment' was the contrast between how the world responded to crisis and how I intuitively responded. While society tried to control the situation through top-down decisions – through force, regulations, new laws, technology, and even war-like language – I found myself reacting in a completely different way. While the world was stuck, I was moving. While society centered itself around fear, I was invited to trust. While many tried to fight or suppress their discomfort, I felt called to step deliberately out of my comfort zone and embrace the unease. And while the world erupted in arguments and noise, I was asked to slow down, quiet myself, and connect more deeply with humanity

and with life. I was invited not to listen to the loud external chatter, but to the quietest voice within.

Later, I realized that these two approaches mirrored two different ways of perceiving life: the masculine and the feminine. And knowing what I know now, I wonder why we haven't found a way to merge these complementary strengths to address crises in a more balanced, healthy way. If not during that crisis, then hopefully in the ones to come.

Ratio and Intuition

My feminine way of perceiving life didn't develop overnight. I learned many of the qualities I will describe in this book over the past thirty years, especially through my professional work. I have always been a writer. Since the age of ten, I have been writing stories and entering writing competitions, and right after graduating I began working for well-known magazines – mostly women's magazines – covering psychological and societal topics. I was an investigative type, endlessly fascinated by the human psyche.

The nineties opened the door not only to the digital world, but also to ideas of inclusion, deep democracy, feminine leadership, holism and a revival of spirituality, known as *New Age*. The world has changed since then, clearly exposing the shadows of that movement – while also elevating some of its insights. Yet those were the years in which books like *Conversations with God* by Neale Donald Walsch or *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield spent years on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list.

My work required me to explore human, social, psychological, and spiritual questions. Through countless books, interviews, and encounters, I gained a deeper understanding, not only of

the world, but also of myself. But the most significant shift occurred around the turn of the millennium, when I was asked to join the research team of a spiritual television program broadcast on one of our national channels. That research work opened me – once firmly rational – to entirely new dimensions. To truly absorb the experiences of the people I interviewed, I had to release my assumptions and prejudices and open my heart to the wide spectrum of human experience. I learned quickly that this was the only way to uncover deeper stories. Listening to others speak about their visions of life opened new landscapes within me. To digest the enormous amount of information I had gathered, I had to begin a long process of inner exploration and self-development – one that took years and, once begun, never really ends.

It helped that I was working in a predominantly feminine environment. In general, women are more inclined toward inner work than men. For the masculine, the first source of inspiration is external and objective. For the feminine, the primary source is internal and subjective – what she feels in her heart or gut. She will first sense intuitively, then verify with facts. Men tend to do the opposite: they seek facts first and only then check within. An interesting difference to observe in times of crisis.

In a world that values objective numbers and statistics over intuition, subjective experience, or the invisible aspects of life, it is unfashionable – sometimes even unacceptable – to trust intuitive knowledge. And yet, for the feminine part of ourselves, intuition often provides the most meaningful answers. Yet, even modern psychology prefers to remain as evidence-based and as scientific as possible. The brain rules. And those who see things differently are often dismissed or ridiculed – even today.

Despite these challenges, something in me knew that beyond the rational, objective world lies another realm that deserves to be explored, described, and valued. In our deepest challenges – often those involving life and death – it is rarely our rational mind alone that brings us answers. It is the myths and stories that speak to our soul, reminding us of who we are and where we are headed. To truly understand the human experience, we must explore both worlds: the objective and the subjective. The masculine and the feminine. The yang and the yin. Even – and perhaps especially – in times of crisis.

Masculine and Feminine

As I continued my work and deepened my exploration of the feminine, I began to notice that alongside the male-oriented values that shape our world, there exists an equally rich set of female-oriented values that have been overlooked, dismissed, or undervalued. These qualities are part of our human nature, and I realized that neglecting them creates an imbalance that is profoundly harmful – not only for women, but for men, children, animals, nature, and ultimately all life on earth.

Emphasizing this in a male driven world is not easy. Yet seeing the state of the world today, I know it would be irresponsible not to speak about it. In our collective decision-making, we urgently need to rediscover the qualities of yin.

Yin is not just a fancy spiritual metaphor or a soft philosophical idea – it is a force. A force that will act on the world, whether we acknowledge it or not. In Taoism, yin and yang represent opposite, but complementary energies that animate the cosmos and shape the dynamics of life. Neither exists without the other: there is no light without darkness, no warmth without cold, no summer without winter. Yin and yang continuously

interact, alternate, and regulate one another. They do not oppose – they intertwine. When one becomes excessive, in its core the other grows in response to restore balance. This dynamic unfolds even, and especially, when we attempt to suppress it.

The next page lists complementary qualities. I invite you to look at them carefully and notice which qualities feel most familiar or valued in your life, and which ones the world expects you to embody. You may find it surprisingly difficult to value both columns equally, even though each set of qualities is neutral and necessary in its own context. The traits you viscerally reject may hold the greatest lessons for you. I encourage you to write them down and keep them in sight; they may become your most surprising teachers.

Head and Heart

In the 2010s, when I was invited to become editor-in-chief of *Psychologies* magazine, my employer gave me a clear mandate: guide our readers from the head to the heart, from an old way of thinking to a new one. In those years the post-modern, self-centered worldview was giving way to an era shaped by diversity, collaboration, and ecological awareness, and the management wanted the magazine to reflect that shift. I accepted the role, not only because it aligned with my professional evolution, but also because it mirrored my personal journey. As someone who had long identified as rational, I had spent years learning to open my heart. I was curious to explore how one brings more heart into a world that clings so tightly to intellect.

YANG

Masculine
Day
Light
Warm
Summer
Heaven
Sun
Extraverted
Give
Objective
Active
Action
Doing
Consciousness
Personal
Individuality
Competition
Strength
Protection
Hierarchy
Specialization
Vigour
Growth
Rationality
Head
Intellect
Knowledge
Exoteric
Science
Mundane
Visible
Order
Structure
Control
Linear
Short-term
Cure, repair

YIN

Feminine
Night
Darkness, shadow
Cold
Winter
Earth
Moon
Introverted
Receive
Subjective
Passive
Rest
Being
Subconsciousness
Relational
Community
Cooperation
Sensitivity
Fragility
Equality
Holism
Resilience
Decline
Feeling
Heart
Intuition
Gnosis
Esoteric
Religion, spirituality
Sacred
Invisible
Chaos
Dissolution
Surrender
Circular
Long-term
Prevention

I also had the intuitive sense that one day the heart would become our new ‘brain’. Not only because it is, metaphorically, the seat of wisdom – something we desperately need in these challenging times – but because I believed that science itself would eventually turn toward the heart, studying its power and intelligence with the same curiosity it now applies to the brain. Some pioneering scientists are already doing this, making remarkable discoveries in this field and beyond.

I embraced the challenge of broadening my audience’s understanding of what it means to be human – opening our minds, but not so wide that our brains fell out. Fortunately, my team of journalists and I found many brilliant thinkers across literature, philosophy, academia, and science who were eager to share new perspectives on life in our magazine. I like to call them *the new thinkers*.

Present and Future

New thinkers are brave. They are pioneers who dare to leave the well-trodden path in search of a wider horizon – people who stretch their minds and hearts to discover truths they never imagined possible. *What else is possible that I would never have thought of?* It is a challenging question I ask myself regularly, because it opens the door to endless possibilities. New thinking is essential for evolution, but it is always a challenge, because the dominant current is weary of change. It takes great courage to walk against the prevailing wind in a world determined to push you in the opposite direction.

We are taught that we live in a free world, but consciously or unconsciously we are guided – sometimes subtly, sometimes forcefully – into certain directions, especially during crises. As I mentioned in the preface, during my three-year-long journey

between 2020 and 2023, I noticed that my responses to crisis were deeply feminine in essence. Yet most people, in times of threat, instinctively adopt or surrender to masculine strategies. And understandably so: when our foundations feel shaken and fear rises, we seek what is familiar, what has worked before. We long for control, authority, order, clarity. We want yang. We want that reassuring masculine voice that says: *don't worry, I'll handle this. I will protect you.* Masculine leadership works well in moments of immediate danger. It is effective for short-term, urgent action.

But while the masculine in us awakes when a crisis erupts, the feminine has been worrying long before, since the first signs of a growing problem emerged. Like canaries in the coalmine, she perceives the small, subtle signals – those faint warnings that have not yet erupted into chaos, but may. Men traditionally protect the family and nation in the moment of danger; women traditionally protect the continuity of the family over time. Men give their lives in war, while women give their lives during childbirth. Women worry about what could grow and harm future generations. When they sense danger on the horizon, they call for caution: *let's not be reckless; let's stay balanced.* They carry the long-term vision, the responsibility for the next seven generations.

Control and Surrender

These concerns are also mine. In the past few years, we have lived through a health crisis that shook our foundations, followed by financial instability, wars in Europe and the Middle East, a rapidly expanding arms race, cuts in social programs, a challenged democratic system, and the dizzying rise of artificial intelligence disrupting about everything we know. And more crises may be coming. We may face a culmination of them.

How will we respond? With pure yang, ignoring the imbalance it creates? Or with a conscious balance of yin and yang?

If we truly seek balance – meaning, if we want to use our *full human capacity* to cope with life, and not only half of it – we must invite the feminine voice back into the public conversation. That means creating space for resilience alongside strength. It means looking not only for ways to solve crises, but also for the courage to examine their origins. It means not only relieving the symptoms, but healing the old pains and conflicts that gave rise to them. We need rationality and science, but also heart and intuition. Decisive measures, but also creative connectivity. The clarity of consistency, but also the wisdom of diversity. Technology and artificial intelligence, but also humanity and ethics. Logic and data, but also nature, magic and wonder. Laws and structure, but also inner freedom and responsibility. Medicines, but also prevention and natural healing. Control, but also trust in the process. And perhaps most of all: we must strengthen not only our desire to eliminate discomfort, but also our capacity to hold space for all there is – even death. Yes indeed – our fear of death might be the big elephant in the room.

What would humanity look like if we lived from a true balance of yin and yang? Or even better: what if we could transcend these polarities and create a third way, that unites both the feminine and the masculine in a new way?

What would humanity look like if humans were no longer governed by the reptile brain – the fear reflex that sees only danger – but instead activated their pineal gland and opened their hearts?

What would humanity be like if we were nourished by a vertical source, grounded in both earth and heaven, so they no longer needed to seek validation from others so desperately?

What would the world look like if people had the strength to face and heal their own shadows, instead of projecting them onto others; friends, enemies, their children, and the world? What would we be like if we stopped searching answers outside ourselves – in laws, models, or algorithms – and instead learned to trust our inner source of knowledge and choose the path that resonates most deeply? Imagine everyone placing their own authentic puzzle piece into the collective picture.

These were the questions I lived with during my journey. They may sound utopic, but they were the themes I actually worked through personally, as I confronted my own rigidity and my old ways of coping with uncertainty during my personal transitional crisis.

I guess my greatest challenge was the question: would I dare to walk the feminine way? Would I listen to my inner voice and follow its guidance? And in doing that – would I find the courage of a true adventurer, risking being wrong or losing myself along the way?

According to the Enneagram – a psychological model describing personality types and their strengths and weaknesses – I am Type One: *the Perfectionist*. The direction of growth for a One is toward Type Seven: *the Adventurer*. As fate would have it, Ton, my partner, is a Seven. So, he was and still is the perfect companion to help me step out of my comfort zone. He has spent more than thirty years traveling the world and is a master of exploring the subjective realms of life. His courage to keep doing so, especially as a man, inspires me. Conversely, my calm and analytic nature grounds his restlessness. Yin and yang in action in our daily life – though in some ways he is more yin and I am more yang. The feminine and masculine qualities are not tied to biological sex, these qualities live within all of us. I want to emphasize this clearly before you continue reading this

book; yin and yang describe complementary energies present in individuals, societies, nature, and the world – not rigid gender roles. Though women might be more inclined to develop certain qualities, and men others. But please read every reference to ‘man’ or ‘woman’ through your own lived experience of these inner polarities.

And so, in May 2020, I closed the door to my home and my former life, stepping into the vast unknown. Not knowing what awaited me. Just as you have no idea what this book may evoke in you: what discomfort you may face, what fear you may encounter, what wonder you may discover.

If you find the courage to keep reading, and to trust despite any resistance that arises, know that this is the very path I walked. And I am grateful that you are willing to walk beside me on this true adventure.

***Footnote:** It is important to acknowledge that the feminine way is not hierarchal or about feminine supremacy; it is ‘inclusive’ – meaning that it seeks a balanced partnership between both forces. It is my deepest hope that the masculine and feminine aspects of being human may finally learn to work together – in men and women, in systems, and in societies.*

In this book though I focus on the feminine and on women, because historically they have significant catching up to do, especially in societal and political spheres, and because I believe their strengths in times of crisis remain underappreciated. But the attentive reader will immediately notice that there can be no healthy feminine without the presence of a healthy masculine. So please notice that when I use the terms masculine and feminine, they refer to energetic qualities present in all people.

