

## *Warriors and Castles*

Imagine someone fortunate enough to get off to a good start with a loving family, a safe and pleasant environment, good health, and a sharp mind. Yet even those with the best of beginnings eventually must suffer pain, sickness, loss, and death of loved ones. The fortunate aren't pressed upon too badly, so are able to stay above the strife and woe and live happily. What of the others who suffer greatly, the walking wounded? Without a viable support system to help they must bandage up their wounds and carry on.

To avoid further wounds and injuries both physically and mentally, we bind ourselves up. First the bandages and splints, then the boots, leather leggings, padded vests, thick jackets, and gloves. Over this goes the armor, head to toe. Some use whatever is available, scrounged from junkyards and garbage heaps, others who have the means use the finest metals inlaid with precious stones, but a menacing and foreboding barrier nonetheless. Then comes the shields and weapons, and finally the masks, and the more sinister and frightening all of these are the better.

We usually don't see these in ourselves or others, as they are often carried below the surface in our unconscious. The mental and emotional baggage can be a great burden using up huge amounts of our energy and attention so that we may find life exhausting, but don't know why. The dysfunction plays out in our lives over months, years, or decades, sometimes kept at bay, but for many eventually overwhelming and dragging them down. Some of this can be seen in the way people dress, move, act, and speak, the pain and suffering obvious or just below the surface. Road rage is a modern example of the anger seething within, and ready to explode on the slightest provocation.

Around us we may build protective castles with tall formidable walls, each huge stone a marker of a past abuse or injustice, the physical and psychic wounds heaped one upon one another. For those mired in sickness and dysfunction the walls are massive and daunting, and more than enough to keep others wary and at a distance. For others the castle is the picture of perfection with just the right house, car, clothes, furnishings, and so on, but still a formidable barrier if used to keep ourselves isolated or above others. We seek the best educations, friends, jobs, and societal positions, and the "right" children, friends, and partners to justify our sick thinking, impress others, or bolster our shaky self esteem.

Around the fortress a moat, often filled with food, drugs, or alcohol, excess working, or possessions, any addiction will do in an effort to insulate us from conflicts. The drawbridge goes down only when we feel safe enough to let others in, which may be rare. The walls and towers stand tall so we can keep an eye on outsiders. Sentries prowl the walls ever watchful and ready to sound the alarm. We vigilantly stand ready to hide, defend or attack at a moments notice. Our fortress also goes deep below ground to dungeons and passages filled with dark secrets, past failures, and errant conquests. All of these play out in our daily lives, however hidden the festering wounds, layers of bloody bandages, padding, armor, weapons, and masks may be,

Those unable to afford comforts and luxuries become bitter and cold, turning to myriad addictions to soothe the aching desperation. Workaholics, shopaholics, and entertainment addicts are but a few of the less noticeable manifestations of the silent and pervasive misery. These images may help us see how we have been carrying pain and suffering inside due to past neglect and abuses. Most often these occurred in our youth within our family, but may just as easily have happened at schools, churches, jobs, or other places, and perpetrated by others outside the family and left just as deep and permanent scars.

All is not lost. It is yet possible to find safe and caring people with whom we can be vulnerable enough to begin to lay down our weapons, remove our masks, armor, bindings, and bandages and at last clean and dress the wound. It won't be fast, easy, or painless. Cleaning wounds hurts more than wrapping them up and leaving them be. Also the causes may be buried so deeply in our past or psyche it may take years of hard work to find and heal them, but with determination, the help of safe and caring others, and a loving Higher Power we find we are strong enough, smart enough, and above all worthy of all the beauty and joy life has to offer.

We may then also swing open the windows, doors, and gates of our kingdoms to let in the light and freshness of the day. We can let others in who understand and support us, so that they may help us with sweeping out the cobwebs and dust of years of denial, neglect, and isolation just as they have. Our dark, cold, lonely halls and rooms may now come alive with the sights and sounds of song and celebration.

How is this possible? What will it take? For me, I was first reminded of the beauty and sacredness of nature, our original blessing, and true home. The healing there for me is awesome in itself, but I had to look further. I next found a spiritual community I could relate with and build bonds of friendship, kindness, and caring. Rebuilding an intimate relationship with my loving Higher power has given me access to infinite power, presence, wisdom, and compassion. From there I went on to twelve step recovery programs, as many of my new friends had found healing there as well. A good therapist can be very helpful as well, and like twelve step recovery, it may take a few tries to find the right fit.

I am a big believer in twelve step recovery, going on seventeen years now. The friendships, wisdom, and healing have been so amazing I'd like to take one minute to tell you about it. I started out in co-dependants anonymous, then moved on to adult children of alcoholics. My parents weren't alcoholics, but many of the people in the meetings have been through such extreme neglect and abuse that they have gained great wisdom and healing they share. There are dozens of programs such as clutterers, narcotics, emotions, eaters, gamblers, and of course alcoholics anonymous to chose from.

In most meetings there are readings of characteristics of healthy and unhealthy aspects of the particular focus, and everyone gets a chance to share (or not). There's no charge for attendance, but most people put a few bucks in the basket that is passed near the end. Wikipedia and other searches lists names and websites of programs that can be found online that have the readings and links to find meetings. Old-timers are often available to sponsor others on a one on one basis, and step study workbooks are available for in-depth study and healing. There are also yearly conferences and retreats for some programs that can be very helpful.

I am a very visual person, and it is my hope that the images here have stirred up something in you. Something that could use some work, some help and healing. Whether it means spending more time in nature, or joining with a helpful, compassionate therapist or community, or turning to a personal, loving higher power and presence, or all of these and more, there is hope, there is help, there is healing. It is up to each of us to acknowledge our need, reach out, and make the time and do the work. Please do. You are more than worthy, and your family, your friends, your community, and the world need you. It's going to take all of us to save the world. *Now* is the time, *you* are the person, *this* is the place. Make it happen before another day, another week, another month, or another year go by!

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## *Unmasking*

We all have problems, often due to the actions of others, so we might say " NO! It's not my fault! My father, mother, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, grandparents, boss, teacher, pastor, priest, friend, etc pushed me down, and is holding me there"! There is some truth to this. When we were children in particular, and "adult children" later on, we were, and are infected, and affected by the dysfunctions, disease, and insanity of others. We may see their faces clearly or they may be vague from the distant past or amorphous entities like cultures and societies. Yet each of these wears a mask. Behind each mask the people who hurt them stretching back for generations and centuries. If you could really look deeply into their eyes, hold their hands, and feel their suffering your heart would melt.

For the masks of cultures and societies that are abusive and cruel there are thousands of faces within, each with it's own story of pain and woe. Yet as we look beyond the masks and hear the heart breaking stories of grief and despair, we come upon our own face. If we are adults now, we can choose again. Over and over and over and over until we are healed. Until we can pull ourselves out of that hole for longer and longer times. Look up! See your wonder child, your loving inner parent, and your true self coaxing you out. Know that a loving Higher Power that created the cosmos and all of life, and sustains them in billions of ways over billions of years is looking out from their eyes, calling out to you with their words, and pulling you out with their arms and hands. We have a God of a million second chances, be a friend of a million second chances to yourself and others if you can.

Sorry to say, but that hole has a gravity to it, as it sucks you back in time and time again. Don't give up! Keep trying! Keep climbing! Keep calling out for help to those who can, and to those who will. The true father, mother, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, grandparents, boss, teacher, pastor, priest, friend, that live in each of us. And no matter how fast or far, or how many times you fall, they will be ready and willing to give you a hand. It doesn't matter so much where you are, as where you are going. What is your direction? Back into the pit or out into a world of wonder and beauty?

And once you get out of that hole, look back and reach out to others who are still in there, still stuck. Look deep into their eyes and past their masks of pain and woe, and give them a hand up and out. You are going to need their help too to avoid or crawl out of all of the black holes, the ruts, and the pits we fall into. It's a work in progress my friends, and we need all the help we can get if we are going to live the loving and beautiful life for which we were intended. We can't let the masks fool us. Not the ones we wear, not the ones others wear. We have to look deeper, listen deeper, and feel deeper.