

Advanced Praise for “Dancing with your Dragon.”

“Shaeri Richards has written a remarkable book and we are very pleased to recommend it to anyone who is engaged in personal growth work.

She has first of all provided us with a basic introduction to, and understanding of psycho-spiritual reality. She gives here a clear exposition of many of Jung’s basic ideas as well as her own integration of other systems of thought.

Secondly she tells us her own story, which deals with learning to handle the way her mother betrayed her. Shaeri used the betrayal as fuel for her own transformational journey and the reader comes away much the better for it.

The third gift she brings us is her own very original and creative journey that teaches us how to “dance with the dragon.” This refers to learning about the inner system of selves, energies and archetypes that are within each of us and also learning to live and work with them as though one was learning how to become a master dancer.

This book comes from many years of personal and professional experience and it will speak to a large reading public. We congratulate her on her work.”

— HAL STONE, Ph.D. AND SIDRA STONE, Ph.D.

Creators of the Voice Dialogue Method and Authors of
Embracing Our Selves: The Voice Dialogue Manual

“Shaeri Richard’s book Dancing with your Dragon: The Art of Loving your Unlovable Self is brilliant, deeply profound and yet easy to understand with many helpful images, stories and practices designed to support our understanding and experience of the paradox of our humanity and divinity. Self-love is not something you can teach and yet Shaeri does an excellent job of providing the tools that will help you to discover how to truly “love yourself like you have never been loved before.” Self-love is an inside job and yet many have no idea where to begin. This book guides the way, the rest is up to you.”

— CAYELIN K CASTELL

Co-author of *The Shamanic Astrology Handbook*,
Co-founder of the Shamanic Astrology Mystery School and
Creator/Author of the *Celestial Timings* e-zine.

“Blending wisdom from the mystery traditions with clear and understandable psychology, Shaeri Richards has created a self-help book that transcends the genre, offering a wealth of practical advice which will greatly help others in their personal and spiritual development.”

— WILL PARFITT

Kabbalist, Psychotherapist and Author of *The Complete Guide to the Kabbalah* and *Psychosynthesis: The Elements and Beyond*

“I remember once hearing that the secret to life is to accept the unacceptable with grace. Shaeri has shown how her own inner journey has led to a deep understanding and acceptance of what we are handed in life and ways to deal with it. This book offers many enlightened ways and methods to heal and love ourselves.”

— ANDREA SMITH

Author of *Enlighten Up: Easy Ways to Rise Above Whatever It Is*.

“Reading this book has changed my life. Since I began dancing with my dragon the dark drama that used to surround me has disappeared. I highly recommend it.”

— KARYN VOSS

Teacher

“Dancing with your Dragon is an intriguing personal journey filled with life experiences, life wisdoms, and spiritual truths that will deepen your love of Self and illuminate light into any darkness that lies within your shadow self.”

— RHONDA PALLAS DOWNEY

Author of *The Healing Power of Flowers* and *Voices of Flowers*

“As I read each chapter, I felt I was starting to think of new ways to be positive in myself. Although it is a book that challenges a person to come face-to-face with oneself in the mirror (which isn't always easy to do) I found this book very accepting. In a world that isn't very kind, I appreciated the comfort.”

— MARY HOLLAN

Singer/Songwriter/Musician

“Utilizing ancient wisdom, powerful perception and a dose of wry humor, Shaeri Richards’ book Dancing with your Dragon translates the esoteric into the understandable. For anyone seeking the Mystic’s Path, Dancing with your Dragon guides the seeker’s feet to the true beginning of any quest: the center of one’s own heart”.

— LANE LAMBERT

Creator of *Tristan and Iseult, a Celtic Love Story*,
Co-author of *Adventures in the Vortex*

“The greatest gift of Dancing with your Dragon is the simple understanding that “it’s ok to be ‘not ok’!” Self-Acceptance is the key and trust is the doorway into a whole new way of being. This book shows us the path.”

— CONNIE BAXTER MARLOW

Visionary Filmmaker and Photographer

“Dancing with your Dragon is brilliant, informative and sensitive, while guiding the understanding of one’s self center core and spiritual values, during life’s many journeys. This is a forever on the shelf reference book for me. Many thanks for your dedication in sharing your “knowledge” and “love of life” with others.”

— JACKI PALMER

Retail Shop Manager, retired

“As I read into this book, I found myself guided to the places deep within, the places where we access the power to transform our lives. Shaeri’s insights, exercises, and most importantly the story of her relationship with her mom, “the venerated therapist,” left me in awe of how she used compassion and self-responsibility to evolve the anger and hurt from the painful events of her life, and morph it unconditional love. If you need to learn to love yourself, this book can really help.”

— JIMMY ALLEN

Mentor and Pioneer of the Future

“Dancing with your Dragon is not a theory; it comes directly from Shaeri’s rich life experiences and she has obviously spent much time researching her subject. It is well written, clear and articulate, with a good balance of light-heartedness and humor. Thanks for making this available to everyone!”

— JYOTI RAWLINSON

Owner Sedona Massage Therapy

“This book contains bountiful servings of “ah-ha” moments and delicious insights. It reminds you to dance to the music of life, even during discordant moments when you lose the beat. Dancing with your Dragon reminds you that everyday, rain or shine, there’s always a reason to dance.”

— JOAN GALE FRANK

Author of *Home Seller’s Blues & Instant Guts*

“Reading this book was like sitting down with a trusted friend and learning from her personal experiences and insight. Shaeri has transformed her life -- and you can transform yours, rising above pain, trauma and past disappointments. Dancing with dragons is liberating!”

— JILL GITTLEMAN

Playwright

“Dancing with your Dragon provides ancient wisdom for a modern world. It is an inspirational companion that nurtures and guides one through everyday life experiences. I recommend it.”

— KO CHOCHAN

Co-author of *Detox for Life: The 28 day Detox Diet and Beyond*

Dancing *with* *your* Dragon

*The Art of Loving
your Unlovable Self*

Shaeri Richards



Heartfull Productions, LLC
Sedona, Arizona

DANCING WITH YOUR DRAGON:
The Art of Loving your Unlovable Self.

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The Dragon and The Child Within

Wild Thing, I Think You Move Me

Dragons are wild animals. In religious mythology, dragons often symbolize what's called our animal nature. In order to learn to dance with our inner dragon, it's helpful to understand what we are dealing with. The inner dragon is wild. It is untamed, untrained and uneducated. It is instinctive, raw power or energy. Dragons take what they want in the world, and they don't say please or thank you. Human children are also known to be wild. Human kids aren't born knowing how to say thank you, they have to be taught; they have to learn. As children we have access to incredible power and energy, but wild human animals aren't allowed to live in the house. Much of our power can be lost in the process of learning to please our parents by being "good" boys and girls. "Dancing with your Dragon" is the art of both reclaiming our power and developing the ability to use it wisely.

As children, we have access to power, but it's the job of our parents to help us learn to use it wisely. For parents—or others that we take on as our authority figures— it's not always an easy task. They have to train us to get along in a world that we will ultimately depend on for our survival. In their desire to help us succeed, they may also limit us through their fear or their inability to see our true potential. We may then take on their limitations as our own. We may shut down access to our own inner knowing out of fear, lack of confidence, or a desire to please.

As young people, our parents are our personal gods. It's only natural that we take what they tell us to heart. They are the ones who pay the bills; they are the ones who teach us right from wrong. They are the ones who help mold our inner opinions and beliefs about who we are and how we must behave in order to get along in society. The range of experience that people have with their parents is so diverse that I couldn't begin to explore all of the possibilities.

The point is that if you don't love or value yourself, if you don't believe in your talents, powers or your gifts, it's important to understand how you came to this viewpoint. It's important that you learn to see yourself clearly. Then you can evaluate the real truth in any given situation. Then you can take over where your parents left off and help yourself grow and mature into the magical being that you truly are.

In order to help yourself grow, it's helpful to make contact with the part of you that's still a child, the part of you that's still untamed and untrained, the part of you that has hungers and needs and is struggling to meet them. I call this part the "Wild Child" within. You'll find your "Wild Child" deep inside, deep at the level of the dragon. Your "Wild Child" is connected to your feelings and lives deep in your physical body, deep in your inner world.

Our inner worlds are full of energy and power. In deep meditation, it's possible to experience this energy directly without shape or form. But that takes practice. In the meantime, it's useful to learn to allow these energies to take shape as symbols or archetypes. The energies take form for us in our inner world so that we can understand and interpret our relationship with these different qualities or powers. It does take a little practice to learn to see in your inner world. To begin, I'd like to invite you on a journey into my inner world, which will hopefully help you learn to see more clearly into yours.

The Dragon and The Little Girl

When things go wrong at my house, there's usually a 6-year-old child involved. I call this child my little girl. She's not my physical child, because I've never had any children. She actually lives inside of me, so I guess you could call her my "Inner Child." When she wreaks havoc in my house, all hell breaks loose. When I talk about my house, I use the word both literally and metaphorically. A house represents both the structure that we live in as human beings (the apartment, the Victorian, the contemporary or the ranch), i.e., our homes, and the structure that we live in as souls (the tall, the skinny, the plump or the petite) i.e., our bodies. When my 6-year-old causes trouble, it starts in my inner world and can very quickly affect my outer world as well.

I love this 6-year-old inside of me. She's magical and mystical. She talks to flowers and trees. She's wild and free. She sings with the birds and dances on mountaintops. She can hear the voice of the wind and feel the heartbeat of the Earth. She's as gentle as a deer. She can also bite your head off if she feels

threatened. This threatened little girl is part of my dragon. She's part of my psyche. She lives in my body. She feels very deeply. Sometimes she's lonely and sad. Sometimes she's angry and resentful. Sometimes she's jealous and afraid. Sometimes she's confused. I can't really blame her. She's only six years old.

Most adults don't understand 6-year-olds. Most adults want 6-year-olds not to chew with their mouths open, not to jump on the couch, not to scream while Mommy's talking on the phone, not to bug Daddy while he's reading the paper, not to paint on the walls, not to play in the mud, not to be bothersome in any way. Most adults want 6-year-olds to be "good," which basically means, "Don't get in my way while I do the best I can to take care of all of my adult responsibilities so that I can support you and myself."

I haven't always been aware of this 6-year-old even though she is clearly a part of me. As I've learned the knack of seeing in my inner world, I've discovered that I have many parts inside, many energies that form themselves into characters who materialize to play the roles that create the movie of my life. The 6-year-old is one of my favorite characters. She lives in my emotional world and she has the potential to bring me incredible joy.

The 6-year-old has always been afraid of another part of me. This part is male and mean, at least from her perspective. He is a stern judge who lives in my mental world. He sits behind a huge wooden desk in his own private chambers. His entire room is lined with bookshelves that contain the world's largest collection of law books explaining all of the proper and exact ways one should be and behave in order to be acceptable and worthy of love. In my inner world this judge has printed out his favorite law, which hangs behind his desk in a heavy black frame. It features large words written in gold lettering that read, "Thou shalt not be angry." The large gold text is followed by smaller words written in silver that state, "Good girls are always loving, compassionate and care about others." Following that, in even smaller letters of delicate copper it says, "God only loves good girls, and bad girls must be punished."

For most of my life, my inner 6-year-old was always being dragged to visit this judge. She would stand solemnly as the case against her was read. Then as she stared at the judge with huge, quivering eyes, he would pound his gavel and say, "Guilty. Take her away." The bailiff would jump up, grab her by the scruff of the neck, and this small child would be dragged off to jail. In my inner world, this jail was more like a dungeon. There she would be stuck in a cage, condemned and forgotten. I wouldn't feed her, or talk to her, or try to find out what she was angry about. I didn't even know I had a little girl inside.

But when the pain got to be too much, this willful child would break out of the dungeon and drag me (and the rest of my inner kingdom) on a crazed, emotional mission in the outer world. She would be desperately looking to find someone or something that would make her feel better, which for me often amounted to a trip to the nearest bakery.

This kind of pattern happened in my inner world a lot. For a long time, I didn't even know about it. I couldn't put it in words, or give it a voice. I wasn't conscious of this process. It was simply a method I employed to deal with emotional energy that I believed to be scary and dangerous. And of course I believed that scary, dangerous things must be condemned and locked away. I didn't know it, but a lot of my personal energy and life force was going toward keeping a big scary dragon in a cage. For many years, this angry, raging energy filled me with terror whenever I consciously came near it, so I simply never went. I kept it locked safely away. As I began the inner journey of self-discovery, I was surprised to discover that for the most part, my angry, raging dragon was really just a child.⁴

Raising Your Inner Wild Child

I once narrated a documentary called "They Don't Come with Manuals." It was about raising children with disabilities, but I find the title applicable to raising any child. You weren't born with a book that told your parents how to raise you. They weren't born with a book that told their parents how to raise them. Animals don't need books to raise their young. Animals don't have choice. They are instinctually programmed with the knowledge they need to pass on to their young ones in order for them to survive and become what they are. If the animal is born as a lion cub, it's going to grow up to become a lion. If an animal is born as a lamb, it is going to grow up and become a sheep. It's a pre-programmed event, pre-determined by Mother Nature. In nature, lions eat sheep. They don't judge themselves for it. They don't think they're bad lions. They don't analyze their behavior, or ponder their actions. They just do what they do. It's instinctual; it's what they do to survive.

It all becomes more complicated when these energetic qualities take up residence inside of us. In my inner world live both a lion and a lamb. The little gentle part of me has always been terrified of the wild part that roars. I

4. See "Meeting the Child Within," Part Three, Page 234

love lions, and I know that I have one, but I've always felt so protective of the lambs of the world, the weak and the meek. I judged my inner lion (my "Wild Child" within) for her potential to hurt others; in the process the inner power that belongs to this king of the jungle was locked away and condemned as dangerous and bad. Growing up, the lamb in me was free to roam, while the inner lioness paced and pawed in her cage, the potency of her life force imprisoned by judgment and fear. In order for me to live free from the constant struggle of these two inner forces, I had to discover a way for them to live harmoniously inside.

When I think of lions and lambs, I think of the Bible. I didn't mean to get biblical when I started writing this, but the symbols just came forth. And come to think of it, the Bible is kind of like a manual that human parents use to help raise their young. The actual quote is: Isaiah 11:6 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the young goat. The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them." Remember, symbols or archetypes are living energies that represent qualities as they exist in our inner worlds. Is it possible for lions and goats and leopards and wolves to live peacefully with each other, all led by a child? It seems questionable in the outer world. After all, it is a jungle out there, and children need to be protected. But in the inner world, anything is possible. And if we can create it on the inside, we can manifest it on the outside; maybe not in the jungles of Africa, but in the jungle of our daily lives.

My mother used to have a poster called "The Jungle and the Garden" which hung prominently at her mystery school. It featured two opposing states of consciousness. On the bottom of the poster was a picture of a jungle, a symbolic representation of the 'eat' or be 'eaten' way of life. On the top of the poster was a picture of a garden, a symbolic representation of a "win-win" world—a world beyond survival, where we all get along through cooperation, support and love. It was up to us as students to learn how to recognize and integrate these opposing ways of being. It was up to us students to find a way to work with both the animal and the Divine within us. These seemingly opposite ways of being are actually integrated in the human heart. The jungle becomes a garden through the practice of compassion, acceptance and unconditional love.

Compassion, acceptance and unconditional love are the domain of the Divine child, the magical being in all of us who can tame the inner and outer madness of life. The Divine child is an evolution of the "Wild Child". We're

all born as wild children. We're all animals at some level of our being. The key to raising and evolving the "Wild Child" within has to do with our inner parenting. A Divine child needs a Divine mother and father. A Divine child needs to comprehend the real truth, which includes a variety of laws: the laws of nature, the laws of man, and the laws of the Divine. Evolving a "Wild Child" to a Divine child requires both education and awareness.

Children need to be taught. The question is how and by whom? My inner "Wild Child" does not respond well to threats, whips, and torture. My inner "Wild Child" does not enjoy being punished or put in jail. When my "Inner Judge" locks her up, she just rebels. My inner "Wild Child" is spirited, like a wild horse. I'm thankful that my silly judge was never able to break her spirit. It's an earthly spirit, but it's a spirit nonetheless and all spirits have a direct link to the Divine. My inner "Wild Child" is the foundation of my human self. She is closely linked with my feelings, which are closely linked to my body and the Earth. My inner "Wild Child" wants to be heard. She has needs. She has hungers and desires that want to be filled. She wants to be accepted and she wants to be understood. My inner "Wild Child" needs compassion and caring. She needs help understanding what's really required of her in this world.

My inner "Wild Child" does not need a disciplinarian with a whip. She needs trustworthy inner parents who can help guide her journey here on Earth. She needs encouragement and support as she learns to believe in her own strengths, abilities and talents. She needs a co-pilot who can help lead her toward her destiny. If your life is like my life, if your outer parents, teachers or authority figures did not fully understand the needs of your inner "Wild Child", then it's up to you to establish a direct link to the Divine so that you can re-parent and reclaim this vital aspect of your personal power. My advice is to turn on your "Dragon-ometer," because the best way to educate your "Wild Child" is to honestly see, recognize and own your power gifts, power potentials and power needs. Through your connection to the Divine, it's up to you to teach your "Wild Child" the truth about life and your capacity for living it.



~ PRACTICE ~

How Do I Judge Thee?

Make a list of all the ways that you judge yourself.

- *Do you judge your body or your features?*
- *Do you judge your sexuality?*
- *Do you judge your communication skills?*
- *Do you judge your salary, house, clothes or car?*
- *Do you judge your spiritual capacity?*
- *Do you judge your intelligence?*
- *Do you judge your job?*
- *Do you judge something that's not on this list? If so what is it?*

Allow yourself to voice these judgments inside your head. Really hear the words inside.

Then notice how the child within responds to the inner criticism. Allow your “Inner Child” to tell you how he or she feels about this judgment. If anger or sadness arises, simply allow the emotions to be.

If you tend to feel judged by those around you—particularly your parents—start to notice whether their judgment serves as a mirror for the way you are judging yourself.



Rules and the Inner Rebel

Human parents have a lot of influence over their young. They are the ones who pay the bills; they are the ones who teach us right from wrong. They are the ones who help mold our inner opinions and beliefs about who we are, and how we must behave in order to survive in life. They are the ones who meet our wildness head on, and must train us to live in a society that (from a horizontal perspective) will be responsible for our survival. Parents usually have rules and as kids we are taught to follow them. Sometimes we are good little children who attempt to follow all of the rules. Sometimes we are rebels who attempt to do things our own way. Sometimes we are both. At any rate, as young people, our power meets their power head on. This power dance at the beginning of our earthly journey has a huge and often unconscious effect on how we work with power as adults.

In the beginning, as tiny babies, we begin our exploration of power through what I'm going to call the emotional body—the part of us that feels. Human infants are really quite helpless. We have many needs as babies, but we are powerless to fulfill them. We have little bodies, but we don't know how to use them; we don't know how to move them toward the things we desire. We can't use words to communicate our needs because we don't know any. As babies and toddlers we actually communicate our needs with feeling-infused sounds. We let out a wail when we're hungry or wet. We giggle or smile when we experience a warm touch, or a beautiful colored toy. As babies, we experience life as a multitude of sensations—a multitude of colors, lights, textures, sounds and feelings. Sometimes our communications are heard and met with love and care; sometimes they aren't.

As babies we don't judge our feelings as good or bad, justified or unjustified. We don't understand concepts like “good” and “bad” apart from how we feel about them. If it feels nice, we like it. If it feels bad, we don't like it. We just feel what we feel. That's all we can do. As children we don't have educated rational minds. The mental or intellectual world comes later as our minds develop through instruction and through life experience. As our training begins, we sometimes learn to feel bad about doing something that actually feels good.

For example, as a baby we might touch our genitals and experience pleasure. Suddenly, Mom, Dad or Aunt Sue might walk in and respond with shock or disgust. They might even slap our hands or yell. Because our emotional bodies are open and vulnerable as young people, we immediately register

their feelings. Our training has begun. We've suddenly learned that a physical act that we have initiated toward ourselves because it feels good can evoke a response from the outer world that feels bad. This experience, and thousands of variations on it, can create a division or a split in our psyches. We may not even remember the experience with Mom or Dad or Aunt Sue, but something remains in our unconscious, something that becomes an internal duality. One part of us wants the pleasure of the genital experience, and another part fears the consequences. Both of these parts now live in our psyche, and these two parts are now at war. We are no longer functioning as an integrated human being. We are functioning as a house divided and a house divided always falls.



Actions always have consequences, and societies always have rules. That does not mean that all of the rules you learned as a young person are true. We're not born knowing rules; we have to learn them. In order to dance with the dragon, discover our individuality, and reclaim our personal power as adults, it's helpful to have a clear picture of our inner system of rules and where they came from. Rules represent our inner authority, they exist in what I'm going to call the mental or intellectual world, and they often oppose an energy or power that originates in our emotional or feeling world. As we grow up, the feeling world may contain so many mixed messages and so much confusion that we just stop going there. We simply cut off from our feelings. Or we ignore them for long periods of time until they can no longer be ignored. We medicate our feelings; we drug our feelings; we stuff our feelings. The feeling world can be the source of incredible beauty and power. It can also be a cauldron of trauma and pain.

Our ability to contact our true feelings is often controlled by a set of inner rules that may have nothing to do with our Divine guidance. This inner rule system (which is sometimes called conditioning) is like a regulator or a governor. It determines our flow of energy or power in the world. It determines how we express ourselves. It often regulates how we are "supposed" to feel. These rules can keep us from a spontaneous and true expression of who we are. Inner awareness as registered by the "Dragon-ometer" can help you become conscious of the inner rules that tell you how you are supposed to look, feel,

talk or behave in any given situation. These rules may have originated from your parents, your teachers, your religious training, or your peers. It doesn't really matter where they came from; it only matters that you become aware of them and how they are operating in your life. It's up to you to re-examine the rules you learned as a young person and to re-educate your "Inner Child" in the light of your adult understanding.



Our parents do the best that they can. They create rules and structure, and attempt to mold us in the best way they know how. But they don't always see us clearly, and they don't always know the truth of who we are. The point is that if you don't love or value yourself, if you don't believe in your talents, your powers or your gifts, it's important to understand how you came to this viewpoint. Once you can see clearly, then you can evaluate the real truth in any given situation. You can begin to value yourself for your talents and your gifts, whatever they may be. You can then know which rules to follow and which ones to ignore. Then you can take over where your parents left off and really help yourself grow and mature so that you can actualize your potential and realize your dreams.

Relationships, Power and the Hungry Dragon

The relationship we have with our inner "Wild Child" reflects or mirrors the relationship we have with power as it pulses through our physical bodies. What type of relationship do you have with your inner power? Do you punish yourself? Are you afraid of your power? Do you use your power to get the things you want at any cost? Are you even aware of your inner power? It's helpful to look inside and discover your personal attitude toward the raw, wild power that lives at the center of your being. The dragon is a symbol for Earth power and life force, the core energy we use to make things happen here on Earth.

The dragon embodies the pulse of life. Dragons, like snakes, undulate when they move, symbolizing the rhythmical waves of power that undulate through our bodies every day. This power, which is also at the core of our sexuality, has the potential to feel incredibly good as it circulates inside of our physical

forms. When the dragon and the Divine are connected, this power is healing, nourishing and fulfilling. Dragon power doesn't originate or come from the outer world; it is not dependent on any physical or outer world experience or stimulation; it is simply the power of the Divine expressing through our physical containers—our physical forms. This rhythmic pulse of life is ours to enjoy, just like a lizard enjoys basking in the sun on a warm summer day.

In “Dancing with your Dragon,” how we work with power or life force as it circulates inside of our own physical bodies is very personal. It's up to us. We can set the “Wild Child” free inside of our own bodies to run, dance, sing and play all day long. This can happen on the inside, no matter what we might be doing on the outside. The “Wild Child” can be dancing inside while we are washing dishes, driving to work or brushing our teeth. The circulation of power or energy in the physical form is pleasurable; it's ecstatic and fun. As long as we have bodies, this power of life is always accessible deep inside.

As children, we're not usually taught about power, or trained how to work with it. We don't know what it is. We only know that we have needs and that certain people, seem to carry an energy or quality that we desire. We believe we need these people order to feel good. This inner desire or attraction to certain archetypes or qualities of power as expressed through others is the motivation behind many kinds of human relationships. We see it, we want it, we move toward it.

When we want and need things from someone, then that someone has power over us. They can manipulate or control us by giving or withholding the things we want and need: approval, money, nurturing, respect, gratitude and the list goes on. By the same token, we can manipulate or control other people by giving or withholding the things they want or need. Manipulation always happens at the level of the dragon. Our “Dragon-ometers” can help us become more conscious of how we participate in these types of energy games until we become wise enough and mature enough to let them go.



Dragons by nature are not conscious creatures. They are not oriented to love, compassion and altruistic behavior. If you happen to get caught in a dragon's lair it's not likely to be a pleasant experience. As humans we can bring consciousness to our inner dragons, but it takes effort. Left to their own devices dragons are going to be focused on their own needs and wants, not the needs

and wants of others. Dragons are self-interested and self-oriented. It's not bad; it's not wrong; it's simply their nature. Dragons don't do relationships.

I can't actually speak about dragons, because modern researchers have never been able to observe a dragon in its natural habitat, but researchers do know a lot about snakes. Remember, dragons and snakes are interchangeable in fairy tales and myths. For the most part, snakes are not social creatures. Unlike humans, they don't have to be sociable. Other than for mating purposes, and possibly for food value (some snakes eat each other) most snakes don't depend on other snakes in order to survive. They don't live in communities; they don't play or have fun together and they don't hunt jointly for food. Snakes don't need each other. Snakes do very well all by themselves.

In general, baby snakes don't even need their parents. Some snake species spend a little time educating and protecting their young, but most spend no time at all. Baby snakes are hatched or born pretty much ready to rock and roll their way down the trail of life. They are born knowing what to eat and when to eat it. They are born with natural defense systems that help keep them from becoming someone else's dinner. They are born knowing when to mate and how to do it. Baby snakes know instinctually what to do to survive. It is encoded in their DNA. By association, dragons, like snakes, are self-oriented and self-sufficient. They have no responsibilities other than to take care of their own personal physical needs. They don't have to take care of their children, and they don't have to take care of each other. If they hurt someone or something through their actions, they don't feel bad about it. They're not even aware of it. They are not conscious of what they do; they just do it out of instinct.

Perhaps you've had an encounter or two with a snake in human form. As humans, when we refer to someone as a "snake," we don't usually mean it as a compliment. A snake among humans is someone who doesn't care about others, someone who acts purely out of their own self-interest, with no concern about who else might be hurt in the process. Dragons and snakes don't care about feelings. They don't even know about feelings. Dragons and snakes are selfish by nature; they are not "other" oriented. For dragons and snakes their relationship with the "other" is pretty basic. Dragons and snakes see the "other" as something to eat, something to hump, something to ignore, or something to fear. An unconscious dragon is focused on itself and its own survival.

All humans have a dragon inside. Dragon power is related to our survival instincts. Dragon power is related to the needs of the physical body, and every "body" has needs. The dragon part of us is base and animalistic. It's

self-oriented and full of desire. In this light, dragons and snakes don't seem terribly attractive. Why should we learn to dance with something as potentially harmful as a dragon or a snake? Why would we want to go near it? In this light, it seems fairy tales and myths may be right; perhaps the dragon does deserve to die. But if the dragon dies, it's like throwing the baby snake out with the bath water. Symbolically, the dragon and the body are closely linked. Just like the baby snake, our physical bodies are born with a wealth of instinctual knowledge designed to help us stay alive and thrive on planet Earth. The body knows things, and if we oppose the dragon, or lock up the "Wild Child," a lot of the body's innate wisdom and healing power gets locked up too.

Researchers have discovered an actual physical structure in our brains that they call the reptilian brain. For my purposes, I'm going to call it the dragon brain. This reptilian or dragon brain is related to the brain stem, which is related to the autonomic nervous system. I am not a scientist, so I won't go into detail, but what I do find interesting is that the autonomic nervous system regulates many functions in our physical bodies that are thought to be beyond our conscious control. The autonomic nervous system regulates our heartbeats, our digestive systems and our breath.

These systems work on automatic. Like the dragon, they operate below the surface, or unconsciously. We don't have to think about them to make them happen. We don't have to remember to make our hearts beat. We don't have to focus on digesting our food, or on breathing. The body does these things for us. It's a good thing, because if we had to remember to make our hearts beat 24 hours a day, most of us would be dead. The dragon brain is working every minute to keep us alive whether we are aware of it or not. Yet many modern people are not experiencing optimal health. Why not? For me, this has to do with the relationship we have with our bodies and the unclaimed or rejected power that circulates through them—the power that belongs to the dragon.

My body functions better when I'm in it, meaning my consciousness pervades or inhabits my body. My body functions better when I'm living in my own skin. When I was a teenager, even before my mother went to India, the Yogis of that land fascinated me. I would read amazing stories about how these people could actually regulate their heartbeats, slowing them down or speeding them up. They could do amazing feats with their bodies and their bodies remained vibrant and healthy throughout their lives.⁵ How did they

5. *If you'd like to know more, read "Autobiography of a Yogi" by Paramahansa Yogananda*

do it? They did it by bringing conscious awareness to the unconscious or automatic functions of their bodies. They learned to consciously interact with parts of themselves that most of us think are inaccessible to us. They did it by becoming present and aware at the deepest levels possible.

When I'm deep inside of my own body, I can actually feel my own heartbeat. I can notice when it speeds up and I can notice when it slows down. Deep inside of my body, I can talk to my stomach, and ride on the rhythm of my own breath. When my body gets out of whack, I can drop deeply inside with presence and awareness. This deep inner awareness allows a meeting of the dragon and the Divine. This deep presence activates the dragon's natural healing power and sets it circulating through my physical form.

The ability to drop deeply inside of myself is a learned skill. It comes from practice. I couldn't always journey deep into my body, deep into the dragon's den. I couldn't go because I didn't like the dragon. I was afraid of it. It felt threatening, scary and bad. I judged and condemned my dragon. After all, dragons and snakes are selfish by nature. Dragons and snakes don't care about you; they only care about themselves. That's a frightening thought if you're about to come face-to-face with a dragon. This really creates a conundrum when the dragon you're afraid of facing is your own. How can you access your own power when you judge it, condemn it, or are afraid of it? Power doesn't have to be used selfishly; it only has to be used consciously.



The journey to the dragon's den involves a deep inner trust. It involves a connection with the Divine, which includes compassion for the dragon within each and every one of us. Remember, in my inner world, the dragon turned out to be nothing more than a wounded "Wild Child" with a lot of feelings that she didn't understand. When I found her, she was scared, angry and confused. The dragon is the animalistic, instinctual part of the "Wild Child", but as a human being, the "Wild Child" has the potential to be much, much more.

My inner "Wild Child" IS selfish. It has taken me a while to get comfortable with this fact, but it is true. I was trained as a young person that it's not good to be selfish—it's not nice. I was trained to share. If I had cookies, I was supposed to share them with my brother and sisters. But my "Wild Child"

doesn't always want to share her cookies. Sharing is a human quality. Sharing is an act of caring, it's an act of love. My inner "Wild Child" is the untrained animal part of me. She wants the cookies all for herself. In her mind, she needs the cookies and if she shares them, there might not be enough for her. When I was growing up, cookies were scarce at our house; we were always running out of them. If you wanted a cookie at my house, you had to act fast or fight for it. This inner sense that you might not get something that you need or want creates what my mother called jungle consciousness or a state of fear.

Going Beyond Fear and Pain

Although I can't prove it, I would guess that dragons and snakes feel fear; I believe all animals do. Fear is what pushes animals to fight or flight, the ancient instinctual response mechanism designed to insure their survival. But for humans (and possibly for all mammals) there are other possibilities. Once we get beyond the fear of survival on the material plane, we can choose to respond to life in a way that lifts us upward; we can choose to respond with feelings like trust and love. This type of response is learned by example. If we did not experience it as young people, we have to teach ourselves about it as adults. This process begins by learning to trust in something that exists beyond the physical world as we know it, yet is always available to us any time and any place. I call this something the Divine.

The Divine can be experienced in many ways, although I personally find the most pleasure when I "feel" the Divine. When I melt into higher, mystical states of consciousness, it is far yummier to my "Wild Child" than a cookie. In fact, if I may borrow a phrase from the Peter Paul Candy Company it is "indescribably delicious." Here's the catch: in order to feel the Divine, I have to be able to access my feelings. I first have to obtain mastery in the world of emotion and pain. We can't master our feelings if we avoid them, stuff them or ignore them. The best way to master something is to work with it, play with it, and truly understand it. When it comes to feelings, the best way to master them is to actually feel them.

As I re-parent my "Wild Child", I let her feel everything she feels. I try not to let her act-OUT her feelings, but I let her act-IN with them. I let her feel them deep inside. I listen to her complaints, which at the beginning of this process included a lot of inner anger and a lot of inner rage. I help her understand where these feelings come from. Is she looking outside for her power needs, or

is she looking inside? Does she need to feel better or superior to others in order to feel okay about herself? Does she need to control other people and their actions in order for her to feel safe? Is she ever intentionally nasty or hurtful to someone? Is someone else ever intentionally nasty to her? Did someone really hurt her, or did she just perceive it as a hurt?

I help my “Wild Child” recognize whether her emotional struggles are the result of someone else’s dragon, or whether it really is her own power needs that are causing the problem. I turn on my “Dragon-ometer” and I help her see and understand the truth. My real mother couldn’t always give my “Wild Child” what she needed, but with the help of my connection with the Divine, I have learned to serve as my own “Inner Mother” and to nourish my “Wild Child” with plenty of unconditional love. Within the “Wild Child” is the blueprint of our Divine self. Within the “Wild Child” is the gift of the snake, the ability to shed our old skins, to drop our old way of being and be reborn to the Divine.

