

PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM

Plato's Symposium serves as a mythical model for this the of split existence. Human beings, the story goes, were once composite creatures that were both male and female. Each being had one head with two faces, four hands and four feet, and both male and female genitals. Being unified and whole, our ancestors wielded tremendous force. In fact, so magnificent were these androgynous beings that they dared to attack the gods. The gods, of course, would not tolerate such insolence, but they didn't know how to punish the humans. "If we kill them," they said to one another, "there will be no one to worship us and offer great sacrifices." Zeus pondered the situation and finally came up with a solution. "Men shall continue to exist," he decreed, "but they will be cut in two. Then they will be diminished in strength so we need not fear them." Zeus proceeded to split each being in two, asking Apollo's help to make the wounds invisible. The two halves were then sent in opposite directions to spend the rest of their lives searching frantically for the other half-creature, the reunion with whom would restore their wholeness.

Just like Plato's mythical creatures, we, too, go through life truncated, cut in half. We cover our wounds with healing ointment and gauze in an attempt to heal ourselves, but despite our efforts an emptiness wells up inside us. We try to fill this emptiness with food and drugs and activities, but what we yearn for is our original wholeness, our full range of emotions, the inquisitive mind that was our birthright, and the Buddha-like joy that we experienced as very young children. This becomes a spiritual yearning for completion, and, as in Plato's myths, we developed a profound conviction that finding the right person -- that perfect mate -- will complete us and make us whole. This special person can't be just anyone. It can't be the first man or woman who comes along with an appealing smile or a warm disposition. It has to be someone who stirs within as a deep sense of recognition; "This is the one I've been looking for! This is the one who will make for the wounds of the past! And this person is invariably someone who has both the positive and negative traits of our parents! (pgs. 33-4)

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- Harville Hendrix