

## **Shrink Rap Radio #203, April 13, 2009. The Feminine Face of God**

**David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka "Dr. Dave" interviews Dr. Sherry Ruth Anderson**

(transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Julia Soliday)

**Excerpt:** *The hero always leaves home and the spiritual seeker in all the sacred literature always leaves home. And so, a big question for us was, do women leave home? Home, in the sense of the familiar culture, the familiar language, the way things are done... Do women leave home, do they have to leave home? If they don't leave home, does that mean they can't be spiritually awake? How can women leave home? Women are the ones with the children. Do they leave home with their children? That's not part of the image.*

**Introduction:** That was the voice of my guest, Dr. Sherry Ruth Anderson, in response to my question about what Joseph Campbell might have gotten wrong about the feminine psycho-spiritual journey. Sherry Ruth Anderson, Ph.D., is the co-author of the best-selling [The Feminine Face of God: The Unfolding of the Sacred Face of Women](#) and [The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing The World](#). Sherry received her B.A. Cum Laude from Gaucher College and Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Toronto. She chaired the Department of Psychological Research at the Clark Institute of Psychiatry from 1975 through 1982, and was the Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto Medical School in Canada. During that time, she was the Senior Scientific Consultant to the Medical Research Council of Canada and two branches of the National Institutes of Mental Health in the United States. Her academic publications include two dozen professional articles, chapters in several books, and a book based on her research of schizophrenic thought disorder titled [Crazy Talk](#). From 1977 to 1984, Sherry studied [Zen Buddhism](#) and served as Head Dharma Teacher at the Ontario Zen Center in Canada. During this time, she taught Zen in North America and Europe. Since 1990, she's been a student of the [Diamond Approach](#) to Spiritual Approach with A.H. Almaas and has been teaching this approach in the United States and Europe since 2000. Sherry also anchored her own daily morning show for CKEY Radio in

Toronto, did a weekly show for CJRT in Toronto, and co-produced with Paul H. Ray, the documentary series, Changing Our Minds on consciousness for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She's also produced and hosted a weekly series on the sacred feminine for KPFA FM in Berkeley, California. Now, here's the interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. Sherry Ruth Anderson, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Anderson:** You're welcome. I'm glad to be here.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, for a number of years, I've been teaching a course at Sonoma State University called Myth, Dream, and Symbol and one of the books I use in that course is Joseph Campbell's [Hero With a Thousand Faces](#), and it's been suggested to me more once that Campbell's book doesn't do an adequate job of describing women's psycho-spiritual development, and it has been suggested to me that your book with Patricia Hopkins, the [Feminine Face of God](#), would serve as a good counter-balance to Campbell's book. But before we get into the whole Campbell thing, let's start out by focusing on your book. OK?

**Anderson:** Yes, that's fine.

**Dr. Dave:** OK. I guess one of the things that kicked off your quest to write this book was the very striking dream that you relate early in the book. Perhaps, you could recap that for us.

**Anderson:** OK, I'd be glad to. I was speaking about that dream the other day actually and thinking sometimes we have what we sense is a big dream, Jung talks about big dreams.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Anderson:** And it feels like they're dreams that aren't just for us. But, what happened for me, I remember that I didn't know what to do with the thing. I remember being, visiting my mother in Atlantic City and she was having some kind of card game, and sitting across from one of her friends, who was, I think maybe, a Hebrew school teacher, and saying, "I had a very interesting dream a while ago." And I started to tell her the dream, and she was

interested, and I would tell the dream to anybody I could think of who it might be for. And then it started to dawn on me that it wasn't just for people that I might meet, it was bigger than that, it wanted to talk to more people. And so, maybe I should tell you that the way I began to really understand what the dream was about and why it was leading me somewhere, was that I was living with my husband, Paul, in Lone Pine, California, a very small town. We had just moved there from Canada where I had been living, and I started to hear a word, in kind of the way sometimes you hear interesting words in your mind, and the word was shekinah, and I'd never heard that word before, but I could tell it was probably Hebrew. But, in those days, you couldn't Google it.

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Anderson:** And so, I went to the local library and I couldn't find any help at all. And then I asked all my friends, and at one point, someone came in with a book, and it was a book that said something about [Kapparah](#), and we looked up in the index, and it said shekinah in Judaism, the feminine faith of God.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Anderson:** And, I remember a kind of, just like goose pimples went through my body. And my friend and I were both Jewish, but we'd never heard that there was such a thing. So, that began my openness to wondering what in the world is the feminine faith of God. And then I remembered the dream that I'd been carrying, it felt like I'd been carrying it around with me for about a year, trying to understand what it was or who it was for. And in the dream, I am happily flying around in the sky on the back of a gold and white dragon. It's very interesting and I'm high up in the sky. And a thought enters my mind, which is I wonder what it would be like to come down to earth, which was very fitting for my life at that point, and I was doing a lot of meditation, and I wasn't very down to earth. And at that point, the dragon descends to earth and there's a beautiful little temple by a lake and I get off the dragon, and I begin to walk toward the temple. And at the gates of the temple are these fierce temple guardians, like the kind you see in some of the

Japanese iconography, with bulging eyes, and a sword, and a fierce black dog...

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, yes.

**Anderson:** ...at the side, right? And somehow, although I never considered myself very brave, I knew that I needed to just go forward. And as I went forward toward the doors, the temple guardians and the dog evaporated and the doors opened. And at that point an old man came out who was wearing a kind of dagger by his side that was covered with jewels. And he took the dagger... He was wearing it by his right side, but he found somehow another dagger from his left side, and he handed it to me, and indicated that I was to wear it on my left side. And then, he let me know somehow, the way you know these things in dreams, that his name was Melchizedek, and yet again, that name didn't mean anything at all to me. But it was very clear that that was the name. And he, kind of, indicated with his hand that I was to lead the way, and I walked through a long tiled corridor. And at the end of the corridor was a second set of doors, and I pushed them, and they opened into a very large room. There was nothing at all in the room, except at the far end was a raised dais, and a third set of doors and a cabinet. I walked over to the third set of doors and I opened them, and I was shocked to see the object, that's the holiest object of Judaism, which is a Torah. And I lifted the Torah, and I took it in my arms. Now, I wonder if it's possible to understand if you're not Jewish and you're of a certain age, if lifting a Torah is normal now in a lot of Judaism, what that would mean to somebody in their 30s. At that time, which was I had never touched a Torah. It was only the men who could lift the Torah, and read from the Torah. And even though I had seen Torahs and I had kissed a Torah by touching the prayer book to it, I had never held a Torah in my arms before. And it was quite an unusual shocking thing to happen to me. And as I held it in my arms, I noticed that it didn't look like most of the Torahs I had seen because usually they're covered with very elaborate covers or velvet covers. This one had no covers at all and it just had a big splot of red wax keeping the scrolls closed, and, you know, they're scrolls with parchment. Usually every word of the Torah is written by a scribe, and they say if even one error occurs, the Torah cannot be used...

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm...

**Anderson:** ...so it has to be perfect. At that point, a table materialized, and I put the Torah down on the table and Melchizedek indicated that the dagger I had by my side could be used to break open the red seal, and that's what I did. So I broke open the seal, and I rolled the Torah, the scrolls apart, and again I was shocked because there was absolutely nothing written there. And I looked at Melchizedek and he said something like, this Torah is not to be read with words, it's to be placed inside your body, and that's the Torah that you need to discover.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow, (laughs).

**Anderson:** So... OK, I lifted it up and I somehow just, you know, put it inside my body, and as soon as I did that, the room burst into this celebratory music, and laughing, and dancing, and was suddenly filled with these dancing holy men, Hasidum, dressed in the way the Hasidic male Jews dressed, actually, they still dress this way in the old city, in Jerusalem. Now, they had on black hats, and black coats, and black pants, and they were laughing, and dancing, and holding hands, dancing in a big circle. And behind them, I could see this beautiful table laden with all kinds of fruit, and roasted meats, and wine, and it was clear that some kind of celebration was happening. They're laughing and dancing, and there's music. They come over to me, and they're wanting me to dance with them. And they take my hands and I dance and I dance and I dance, and I'm laughing too. And finally, I say to Melchizedek, "What's going on? What is this?" And he says, "They are celebrating that you, as a woman, are being initiated now as one of them."

**Dr. Dave:** Wow.

**Anderson:** And I say, "But I'm a woman. I can't be initiated into this sacred community." And then I recognized, as you can only do in dreams, that these are not just men from the 18<sup>th</sup> century Poland or orthodox men from today. I recognized there's all the patriarchs, King David and King Solomon, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And they're all the patriarchs of the people, and I say to them, "How can I be initiated as a woman?" And they say that you are not the only one. Thousands, and thousands, and thousands

of women are coming forward now, and they are coming forward to be initiated and take their place to lead the people into a new way of life. I don't know what to say, and I say to them, "Will you help us?" and they say, "We can help you, but we no longer know the way. You women need to find a new way." And that's the end of the dream.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow. Talk about a bar mitzvah.

**Anderson:** (laughs) Amazing that is...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, you had a curious little dream, and so, that really set the stage in such a dramatic way. I can see how you really from that point on must have really had a sense of mission, and at that time you and your co-author were working on the book, or no, at the time that you and your co-author were working on your book, the feminist movement was under way but there was, as of yet, no work describing the unique experience of spirituality from a woman's perspective.

**Anderson:** You know there were things. A very important book, was a book – I can't remember if it was right at that time, but around that time -- by [Tsultrim Alione](#) called [Women of Wisdom](#), and she was a [Tibetan Buddhist](#) practitioner. I remember she wrote... The purpose of the book for her was to write about unknown famous Tibetan women who had been leaders but what was most important to me and to Pat Hopkins, who I wrote the book with, was Tsultrim had a long preface where she told about her personal life. She had one line in there that I never forgot, it was so powerful. She said, "My spirituality is like a shy, young girl, and it shuts down tight in militaristic situations."

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Anderson:** (laughs) And I had been the head dharma teacher at the Zen Center in Toronto for many years before this.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Anderson:** And when I read Tsultrim's words, I thought, oh, so has mine. My spirituality has shut down because my teacher, who was a great Zen teacher,

was also somebody who was a very militaristic kind of person. And a lot of the way formal spirituality was done in those days was all about discipline and will, and it was a pretty macho world...

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yes.

**Anderson:** ...and in addition, there were in Christianity some very interesting women. [Schussler Fiorenza \[?\]](#) is one whose name comes to mind right now, who were pouring through the Bible, looking for individual instances where it could be construed that there was something feminine there. But it was hard, dry work, and there weren't a lot of examples of that. So there were scholars who were looking. [Rita Gross](#), in Buddhism, was also doing work. And then there was the Goddess movement, where women were meeting [Starhawk](#), and some other people were beginning to do their work. But we were like little pockets, and when I would try to read some of the Goddess work, for example, it felt like, well, I don't know if this is me. When I would read, say, the Tibetan Buddhist work, it was like that was meaningful, but I don't know if this was me. It felt like I was living a pretty ordinary life and I couldn't connect to these little pockets of discovery that were happening all over, they really were happening, but the question that was coming up for me, and that Pat and I were sharing, was this idea that there's a new way and that women are going to discover the new way, and that the men who were the patriarchs and who were the teachers in the past, were our brothers. They wanted to help us, but they didn't know the way, and that we were going to show, or open, a new way. And that sense of... It's not just in special pockets, and it's not just, you know, special women saints, whether they were Buddhists or Christian, that there weren't just special people. It was coming through all of us, and that it was everywhere, and we only needed to start to look, and start to listen, and start to hear each other in the speech, was the way we thought of it in those days.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, and so, you and Pat then set out to explore these issues, and to do it in the form of a book that would be based on interviews with women...

**Anderson:** That's right.

**Dr. Dave:** ...and so tell us a bit about that methodology. I was struck that you spent two days, and sometimes four days with each woman.

**Anderson:** Yeah, I guess I should mention that I was a professor of, actually, of psychiatry at the University of Toronto Medical School before I moved to California, and my... I had been head of a department of psychological research for twelve years, so I had done nothing but psychological research, so I was a researcher. And when Pat and I realized that we wanted to find out more about the development of women's spirituality, we figured we would be doing a research project. And so, I knew all these things about statistics and how to do research, and so I kept trying to come up with systematic questionnaire type items, you know, to ask people...

**Dr. Dave:** Sure.

**Anderson:** ...which was a big flop. (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Anderson:** And finally, I really was perplexed and didn't know what to do. I picked up a book by a famous research psychologist on leadership, and he was describing how he had gone about learning about leaders, and he said, our method, if you can call it that, which I doubt... (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Anderson:** ...was just basically to go and sit with people, and ask them about their lives. It was more of the kind of research you do when nothing is known about the field. You have to be open, and so that was our research methodology. There were no statistics. We ended up interviewing... I think we wanted to interview thirty women. I think we ended up talking to maybe a hundred, and we would ask... Because our book was probably the first to do this, the women we approached were very open and very interested themselves in being interviewed and in talking with us. We wanted... We knew that we didn't want any spokeswomen; we didn't want anybody who was like the spokeswoman for the Catholic Church, or the spokeswoman for reformed Judaism, or whatever. We wanted women who were actually walking their -- walking the walk...



**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Anderson:** ...and we wanted to find contacts from people who knew them well, who could say, every day, the way they live demonstrates some kind of genuine realization, some kind of genuine spirituality, as far as I can see. So, we started, kind of, shaking the networks, and asking people to recommend people to us, and then maybe they would recommend other people to us. And so, we started hearing from people all over the place. One of my favorites was somebody knew [Wally Amos](#), who was the maker of Famous Amos Chocolate Chip Cookies.

**Dr. Dave:** All right, I remember him...

**Anderson:** You remember him, huh? (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** And I remember his cookies, too. (laughs)

**Anderson:** Yeah, and they were very good cookies. He wanted us to interview a woman named Sweet Alice, he told us, who lived down in Watts, in south central L.A.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Anderson:** And we said, "Well, why do you want us to interview her?" And he just said, "Well, she's the holiest person I've ever met," and so, off we went. We contacted her and she was willing to see us. We spent a day or two with Sweet Alice down in Watts, and we got to know about about her work, and it went on like that. So, that's how we found the people. We asked them if they would be willing to talk to us and sometimes they said things like... [Meinrad Craighead](#), for example, who lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico and she was a marvelous artist, very exciting artist, and she published – at that time, she had a book called the [Mother Songs](#) with her artwork, and we asked her... It was very exciting. We knew she had been a nun for twelve years in England and had left the convent to continue with her artwork. We had asked if we come and visit her, and she said, "Well, yes, but you'll have to, of course, interview my friends as well because the spirituality that I live is in a context of many, many other women. So be prepared to interview my friends and meet them as well." So, we were happy with that and we stayed

in a hotel in Albuquerque somewhere, and went to visit Meinrad, who lived by, right on the Rio Grande with her... I can't remember if there were six or eight huge Irish Wolfhounds...

**Dr. Dave:** Oh my goodness.

**Anderson:** (laughs) So, anyway, it was like that. Oh, one more, maybe I can tell you about. A woman named [Irene Smith](#). We met Irene, it was the beginning, the very beginning of discovering what AIDS was, and people were terrified. People in hospitals didn't want to touch AIDS patients, and there was a picture in the front of the San Francisco Chronicle that showed a woman holding the head of a man with the red blotches that were associated with AIDS in those days. Holding his head with such an extraordinary, loving touch that it even came through the photograph in the newspaper, and her name was Irene Smith. And we contacted her and asked her if she would be willing to speak to us. She had started the first massage program for AIDS patients anywhere in the United States, and she was changing the perspective of caregivers about how to approach AIDS. So, we asked her if she would be willing to speak to us, and she said she was, and we had a lot of trouble finding a time and finally we tried to understand why she needed so much time in order to get ready to talk to us. We said, "It's only going to be a day and a half of an interview," and she said, "You don't understand. I'm going to talk to you honestly about my life if you asked. I have to prepare to do that for several days and then I'm going to need several days afterwards to recover from sharing with you what I've told you." And when we actually did the interview, we understood why.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow.

**Anderson:** So, that's how the women came to need us for these kinds of energies. It really was unusual. In later years, I think what happened was, a number of books started to come out and I, you know, that quality of meeting was no longer possible.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. Wow, what an adventure this project set you out upon. As you looked for a metaphor to house your findings, you came up with the image of a sacred garden. Say a bit about that if you will.

**Anderson:** Yeah. We tried all kinds of metaphors. We kept, you know, I think what it was, was we were looking for a container because what we were doing felt, and still feels to me, so new that there wasn't a container. We didn't know the questions to ask. All the questions even we could think of to ask about spirituality were men's questions, and so, we thought if we had some kind of image or metaphor, that could be like a compass setting. It would give us an orientation or it would be a container, a vessel, or something. Everything we tried just felt fake, and then, I think what happened was I started to have images. I would have an image in my mind of like, ivy growing on a wall. And, I... And then maybe a door under the ivy with a little doorknob, and I didn't know what that was until my husband, Paul, and I were visiting a friend in Niagara Falls, and we were walking – can see it so clearly – we were walking one evening, and it was just about getting dark, it was winter time. And we were walking past a book store, and in the window of the book store was a book called the [Secret Garden](#). And I remembered this book from childhood and on the cover of the book was the wall with ivy, and the little door that you could see just inside the ivy. And I realized, oh, that's the image that we want to use because in that story, which I think at the time we came upon it was already a hundred years old, is the sense of a little girl who was born in India, and I think her parents die and she is taken on the moors of Scotland. And her uncle has a great estate with public gardens and she can't find for herself. And then one day, she finds a secret door and that leads into an enclosed secret garden and that was personally real and true, as she put it. And we felt, that's it. So, we actually used the stories from the Secret Garden as the scaffolding for the whole Feminine Face of God book. Every chapter originally started with a quote from that book, and it was only at the end when it was time to publish it that we took that scaffolding away and only left a quote or two from that book. But we felt that we were being held in a container, at that point, and the sense was very much like a secret garden, or a sacred garden, or another image that came for us, was tidepools, that what was happening for women at that time was a sense of a need for a protected, contained time out of time, inner exploration and inquiry. And it was not about a public face, a public voice. And by the way, this was actually a very important -- we didn't realize it at the time -- but it was a very important development in the

women's movement itself because in the women's movement itself, there were two parts to the movement. One was the outer political activism and the other was an inner kind of experience, a political on the one hand, and a cultural on the other. And in the cultural part, that's where the women discovered what they thought, they heard each other into speech. They spun and wove and created the fabric for an understanding of what was possible. And I think... I'm sure that you must look at this, David, in the work that you do, the sense of the need for... The Jungians sometimes used to use the word "Temenos," a sacred space in which the truth that needs to be uncovered for our time can unfold itself in an organic way.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, and you know, part of what I took from the Secret Garden, or from your image of a sacred garden was that it was a container for, that the garden is a container for different kinds of plants...

**Anderson:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. Dave:** ...and so in that way was a metaphor for different types of experiences that women might have. So, it wasn't a metaphor that demanded the allegiance to a single image or model.

**Anderson:** Yes, and I love what you're saying. It's so important. You know, I'm doing research these days about aging, and I have the same feeling about that, there's... It's so easy for researchers to create a kind of monotheism, a kind of... There's only one way, or there's one great way to see what, in aging, about what successful aging looks like and in the case of women's spirituality, of what a spiritual woman looks like. Or in those days, it wasn't even a spiritual woman, it's what spirituality looks like. And what we were finding then – I think it's just true of people – is that what's so precious is our uniqueness and how to really nurture that and encourage that emergence. It's a great question, I think. And we have such a tendency to kind of shove each other and ourselves into boxes...

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Anderson:** ...and if we don't fit into that box, whatever the box is, no matter how lovely, if we don't fit into box, then somehow we're not measuring up, and that kills the emergence.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. Now, in the book, you make reference to the "deep feminine" and it seems to me that's a term that might different things to different people. Can you say what you mean by the "deep feminine"?

**Anderson:** I don't remember what I meant by that. (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs) OK, fair enough.

**Anderson:** You're absolutely right. You're absolutely right. It means different things to different people. You know, the main thing that I think was important, as I just reflect on it now and that book, I feel it very much these days, is the sense of a new way, and that there's a new way that's emergence, which to me means the truth of what's needed now in our time, say, it's through the feminine. It's something that will be, will reveal itself, if there's a deep enough listening or openness and holding for that to happen. And just like in other kinds of emergence phenomena where there's something that's new, I don't think that it's an individual event. I think it's a phenomenon that can develop when you come together in faith circles, or small circles, or developing circles. That the part of the whole, the soul itself needs to be seen, and when that seeing happens in, say, a small group of witnesses in a sacred holding place, then something emerges that is so fresh and so new. And I think there's something about the collectivity that lets that be appropriate to the need of our time.

**Dr. Dave:** OK. Well, let's come back to my original question in relation to Joseph Campbell's model of the journey of the hero, and of course, he wrote Hero With a Thousand Faces in the pre-feminist days of 1945. What parts fit and what parts don't fit in terms of the feminine psyche?

**Anderson:** Hm.

**Dr. Dave:** Can you comment on that?

**Anderson:** I just have to tell you. Your asking me that question reminds me. I adore Joseph Campbell, and I had opportunities to be with him at different times, so I think – will you...maybe – is there time? Can I tell you a Joseph Campbell story in order to answer your question?

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, definitely. Definitely.

**Anderson:** OK. So, I was living in Toronto and Joseph was speaking in Montreal on the, I think it was the dark feminine was the topic he was speaking on, and I went to interview him. I had a radio show at that point, in Toronto. I went to interview him, and he was talking about the power of myth, and how terribly important myth was because it had all these different functions. It had a teaching function. It had a cultural function, and it really was a kind of container that showed people how to live. And I said, "Well, where are the myths that we need now for our culture?" And he said, "There aren't any." I said, "There aren't any? You just told us how important it is, that there are just four functions of myth and how much we need it." And he said, "No, there aren't any myths now that have power for our culture. The individual is just going in raw." I think I must have spluttered.

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Anderson:** (laughs) And I said, "Well, what are we going to do?" And he laughed, he was sitting in some kind of rocking chair. He rolled back and he laughed, and he said, "That's not my problem."

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Anderson:** "I can tell you what a myth is, and I can tell you what it does, but I can't," you know, "give you a myth for our time." Each person has to find it for themselves." And I remember, at that point, feeling this oh, passionate intensity, this fierceness, and thinking, you're wrong, Joseph. We have the myth. We are going to have the myth we need now, and they are going to come from our dreams. But I guess I didn't have the courage to say that to him.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Anderson:** So, the differences between the hero's journey and how it is for women, well, this is such an interesting question. I think that the main thing that was a great puzzlement for Pat and me, as we started to look into that question, was the idea of leaving home. The hero always leaves home and the spiritual seeker in all the sacred literature always leaves home. So, a big question for us was, do women leave home? Home in the sense of the familiar culture, the familiar language, the way things are done... Do women leave home? Do they have to leave home? If they don't leave home, does that mean they can't be spiritually awake? How can women leave home? Women are the ones with the children. Do they leave home with their children? That's not part of the image.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Anderson:** And then even the images of the great women are mirrored by the women saints, a lot of whom starved themselves in the Christian tradition. You don't hear about the children. And so, we even began to wonder if the stories of the women saints and sacred figures were stories that men admired. But what about things that had meaning for women? So, that's an example of how we just realized we didn't even know the questions to ask because all our paradigms were from male models.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Anderson:** So, we began to feel that the questions themselves were, you know, the most powerful things that we could come up with. And one of the things that we began to find was that the women that we talked with seemed to have made their connection to the sacred before ever leaving home and without leaving home. Absolutely, leaving home... There were some that did, but that that was not at all a necessary or important characteristic of the women's lives who we interviewed.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, that's very interesting. That really helps to answer my question.

**Anderson:** Good.

**Dr. Dave:** I mean, that's the very first stage of Campbell's journey...

**Anderson:** I know.

**Dr. Dave:** ...if we're parting company already. Much of your book is set against the foil of the patriarchy. Do you think there needs to be a matriarchy or some other model... Or some other model needed?

**Anderson:** Oh no, no. Actually, I'm creating a sacred feminine program with two friends, one from a Christian tradition, and one who is a Tibetan Lama. We were talking about, you know, what does the sacred feminine mean now? Because the Feminine Face of God, I think it was – I forget when it was written -- 1981?

**Dr. Dave:** It was 18 years...

**Anderson:** ...18 years ago.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Anderson:** Yes, so that's it, and of course it appeared 18 years ago, which means that it was written, it took us 7 years to write it...

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Anderson:** ...so it was like 25 years ago, we began to write that. So, as we were looking now to think about, you know, what is the sacred feminine from what we can see now. It seems like so inclusive; the feminine is inclusive. It's like, you know that rhyme, "Straight is the gate, and narrow the way; many are called, but few are chosen."

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Anderson:** ...from the Bible. We thought now, that is the perspective of the one who's getting born. It's like it's a narrow gate, and I don't know if I'm going to make it through. But the one who gives birth, that gate is wide. That gate says every single child who's born is precious. Not many are called and few are chosen. They were all chosen. They were all welcomed. And so, the sense of what the sacred feminine looks like now is, seems to me, the idea of matriarchy is not the point at all. It's the idea of a profoundly inclusive global sacredness, and the question is... It seems to me, the real work of our



time is about how we can learn to work together, learn to see all the children as precious, all of the elders as precious, all of us. Every living thing is precious. How do we do that work? I think that's what the sacred feminine is.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, sign me up for that. I can... (laughs)

**Anderson:** (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** ...I can definitely buy into that. Now, you were a Buddhist teacher for many years...

**Anderson:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dave:** ...and you alluded to a bit of a struggle reconciling the militaristic approach that some forms of Zen can take to the feminine. I see that you're now involved teaching something called the Diamond Approach to spirituality. What can you tell us about that?

**Anderson:** Yeah, the Diamond Approach is really... I, kind of, went into kicking and screaming, because I... After writing the Feminine Face of God, I really loved all the spontaneity that was there and the Diamond Approach is an approach that has a teaching with it. But what it does is it brings the body and the psyche and the, you know, the boundless dimensions of reality, all totally one wholeness. So that there's no separation. It's like the deepest most difficult, the things that you want to run away from that you think are awful, and the things that you want to run toward that you think are wonderful. Every one of them is a doorway to knowing the most real hindered truth about what reality is and about what we are as human beings. And it's really, you could say that from a certain perspective, it's what I said about the feminine...

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Anderson:** ...it's so inclusive. There is nothing that a human being can experience that doesn't take you to the sacred, if you can follow it all the way through from wherever the experience comes from. Let that open, see what's there under that. See what scares you about even letting yourself feel that, and

keep following it. That doesn't mean, of course, acting it out. It only means experiencing what's there, and inquiring, asking. So, there's that profound openness to, you know, for me, the way I asked the question is, what does it really mean to be a human being? To me, that is the deepest question. And in the Diamond Approach, what does it mean to be a human being and what's the nature of reality are completely... One reveals the other.

**Dr. Dave:** Something about the term "The Diamond Approach" – I don't know why I have this association – but I'm wondering, is it derived in some way from Tibetan Buddhism? Or what are the origins?

**Anderson:** I can see why you would associate it with Tibetan Buddhism because diamonds are an important part of some of the iconography in Tibetan Buddhism.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Anderson:** But, the term actually comes from a direct perception of the man who was the founder of the Diamond Approach, whose pen name is A.H. Almaas. And the diamond, one of the great things about a diamond, you know, is that you can see through each different facet into the essence of what's there, and however many facets you look through, there's always the truth that's deeply in the core of it. So, the term implies an objective perception of the nature of reality.

**Dr. Dave:** OK. Well, as we wind down, I wonder if there are any final thoughts you'd like to leave our audience with.

**Anderson:** Oh, that's a... I guess the thing that I feel right now... It's been so interesting talking with you and just reflecting on, you know, this long arc of perspectives of the work that I've done over the years. It's be true to yourself. The more that you can really be interested in your actual experience and where that takes you, and you can keep being open and interested in what that reveals. It's like that is more valuable than any teaching in the world.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow. Dr. Sherry Ruth Anderson, it's been delightful speaking with you. Thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Anderson:** You're welcome. It's a pleasure.

**Dr. Dave:** I found this conversation with Dr. Sherry Ruth Anderson delightful. I hope you did, too. As you heard, I was particularly interested in discovering what disagreements, if any, Sherry might have with Joseph Campbell's model of the hero's journey. I found her observation that women, in general, may not have the same sense of leaving home that men do, to be a new thought for me. I wish we had had time to explore other places where she feels the model doesn't fit. If any of you listeners knows of a book that goes into this specifically, please let me know. I continue to be very impressed by Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and I can't seem to bring myself to dropping it off the list of assigned books for the course I teach on Myth, Dream, and Symbol. His book is a mind-stretching, even life-changing classic in my opinion. While it may not be a perfect fit for the women's journey, he does include myths and stories that include heroines as well as heroes.

I guess part of the reason I'm so attached to Campbell's model is that it's such a good fit for my life, particularly for my younger life, when I so deliberately was questing for adventure. I couldn't wait to get away from home. My parents had little money with which to send me to college. I spoke quite frankly with my mother about my desire to go to school somewhere away, away from Los Angeles, away from California. She understood and supported me on my quest. She helped me fill out college applications and scholarship applications to about 20 different schools, as I recall. It was a huge labor, but it paid off when I received a full scholarship including tuition, room, and board to the University of Pennsylvania. That would probably be worth \$100,000 or more today. What a tremendous opening for my subsequent life that turned out to be. So, there was the leaving home part of the adventure, but then there was also the very male road of trials, both those that came unbidden and those I created with things like hopping freight trains with my friend, Jerry, brushes with the law, motorcycles, sky diving, foreign travel, amorous adventures and more. And then, there's that very first phase of the journey, which Campbell refers to as the "call", and which has always resonated within me very deeply. The "call", I think, often begins with some early wound in the family that marks

one, sets one apart. I definitely have had a profound sense of "call" throughout my life though I could not always articulate what I felt called to, or where I thought it might lead. Certainly, this podcast, this reaching out to you, is my response to a call, and part of the ongoing adventure.