



EXERCISE

Meeting the Sirens

THE Sirens' Call can come in many ways, but here we will experience a particularly delightful, and indeed salutary, version of it. As with the Sirens themselves, people have to be dragged away from this process. It involves listening to things you have always wanted to hear about yourself.

TIME: Ten minutes.

MATERIALS NEEDED: None.

MUSIC: None.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE SOLO VOYAGER: Stand in front of a mirror for several minutes and say absolutely smashing things about yourself to your own image. To experience the process even more fully, make a tape of yourself singing your praises—or even better, ask a friend or two to do it for you—and play the tape while standing in front of the mirror and adding your own flattering commentary nonstop for about two minutes.

SCRIPT FOR THE GUIDE: For this process, the group needs to break up into threesomes, with one person in the middle and the other two on either side. Before we start, let me explain the procedure. The person in the

THE SIRENS, SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

middle takes the role of Odysseus, who will soon listen to the most wonderful things being said to him or her. The people on either side will take the role of Sirens, but you will also be the sailors who bound Odysseus to the mast so that he could not escape. You will do that by holding the middle person by the arms.

Then you will each place your mouth close to the ear of the middle person and begin to speak to her or him, very close to the ear so that the two voices are inescapably pouring into the ears of the listener in the middle. You will say extraordinary and flattering things, which are more or less true, about the person in the middle. You will speak simultaneously, although each person is saying something different. It is this experience of two different voices saying different things spilling into the ear that is so dizzying and Siren-like. Speak very rapidly for perhaps two minutes. As an example, one person might be saying something like this:

“You are really the most wonderful person I know. You are so handsome and strong and courageous, and you have the best ideas and the most intelligent way of looking at things. You’re cute too. I’d vote for you for president any day. Whenever you walk into a room everyone becomes alive because you’re there. You light up everything. I’ve never known anyone with so much grace and charm...”

Meanwhile the person at the other ear might be saying something like:

“Fascinating! You are the most fascinating person I know, and yet so profound. With your personality and brilliance you can do anything you want—and help everybody while you’re doing it. Not since George Washington has there been your equal. And kind! You are so kind. The milk of human kindness just rolls through your veins. And good too. You’re like the next step in human evolution. When I grow up I want to be just like you...”

[At this point the guide might want to select two other people and demonstrate this process.]

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The person in the middle just takes it all in as his or her due and basks in all the glory. Since it's coming so fast and furious this person has no time to block or doubt or disparage. He or she can only accept these wonderful things being said as the gifts of knowledge concerning true conditions from the Sirens.

After several minutes have elapsed I will call time, and the second person will go into the middle and become Odysseus, while the first person will take up a new role as Siren and give as good as he or she got. Then I will call time again and the third person will have a chance to be bound to the raft and listen to the Sirens call.

Now we will begin. Separate into groups of three people if you have not already done so and let one sit in the middle. Those playing the Sirens' role, sit so that your mouth is very close to the ear of your Odysseus.

On your mark. Get set. Sirens' Call! [One to two minutes.]

Stop! Now change places so that one who had been a Siren goes in the middle, and the middle person becomes a Siren.

On your mark. Get set. Sirens' Call! [One to two minutes.]

Stop! Change places again so that the remaining Siren gets to be in the middle.

On your mark. Get set. Sirens' Call! [One to two minutes.]

Stop! Now, spend a few minutes discussing among yourselves what you have experienced.

[Almost invariably people will be giddy and quite delighted at what has happened. The guide may want to have the group at large share some of their findings after the initial sharing in threesomes. It is also interesting to discuss possible applications of this exercise in everyday life.]