

Thriving in Your Third Act™

Goddesses and Archetypes in the Third Phase of Our Lives: How to be a juicy crone

Jean Shinoda Bolen

Sabrina: Hello, everyone. It is a joy to introduce you to Jean Shinoda Bolen. Jean is an internationally known speaker and author of 13 books and over 94 additions of those books including the books *Goddesses in Older Women* and *Crones Don't Whine*. She is a Jungian analyst, psychiatrist, feminine activist, and advocate for United Nations Fifth World Conference on Women. Jean, I am so jazzed you're joining us today. Welcome.

Jean: Thank you. I'm looking forward to how we are going to talk about this third phase of life that I'm in.

Sabrina: Yes, and so am I. Jean, your book *Goddesses in Every Women* and also the book *Crones Don't Whine* is so relevant to our summit for Thriving in the Third Act, and *Goddesses in Older Women* as well, because more than ever, we really are stepping into our power, especially as the tide is turning in our country these days with the Me Too Movement, more and more women are stepping up. Your books have been empowering women for over 30 years with the notion of archetypes. Can you tell us what the benefits of using archetypes are for women's empowerment, especially in comparison to, say, other spiritual modalities like tantra or yoga or chakra energy meditations?

Jean: It really has to do with Carl Jung's introduction of the collective unconscious as being part of us, that is to say there are basic patterns of being and behaving that we come into the world inherently able to access. It has something to do with when you listen to a story, you resonate with it if it resonates with the archetype that's in you. For example, if you are someone and *Goddesses in Every Woman* talked about the goddesses, for example, like Artemis that is the sister archetype, not everybody feels very sisterly. Some women do not. Some women feel very motherly and that was Demeter, the mother goddess, and to understand and see your strengths and your shadows. Most everybody are not introduced to the strength and the shadow parts of the major patterns that show up very early in life. If you were an Artemis, you showed up at two and three and four with a definite sense of what you want and what's fair. I mean the little kid who says, "That's not fair," that's an Artemis. That's the social justice advocate later in life. There is something that rings true about the major goddesses and gods in Greek mythology. They're recognizable because they're part of our inherent inner sense of patterning.

I wrote about the *Goddesses in Older Woman* as not being as clear cut with the earlier goddesses that we know from studying seeing pictures of the major ones. They're recognizable as outer personas, outer elements. But when you get to this third phase of life, which is also archetypal, archetypal is maiden, mother, crone or maiden, mature woman, crone. These are the three phases that we all live through as women; that the maiden is from girlhood to adolescence to where she is moving into her potential as a sexual being and as a woman who could have a child, but she is not yet there. Then the mother or the mature woman are those ages that we go into where it's literally true that we become a mother, or we are maternal and we mother, mentor, help an organization to grow. We grow into our own maturity in that phase.

Then along comes that menopause thing. There's suddenly a limitation. There's suddenly a place where you no longer can give birth to a child. In patriarchal stories, cultures, most women then at that phase become of little value. When, in fact, it is the most interesting, individuating possible phase that when you are through taking care of the family, when you are through a lot of those growing pains, when you've been through the experiences of falling in love and loss and all the kinds of things that happen in our most active middle years and then you get to the phase called what the goddess did, the goddess was known in her three phases. That's the archetype of the goddess as maiden, mother or mature woman, and crone. The archetype is the moon. When we look at the moon, we can see her as a waxing moon or maiden. We can see her as a full moon. The waxing moon was young Artemis, young Athena, young Persephone. Then we move into the full moon which is mostly considered Demeter or Aphrodite. Then there is the waning moon. The waning moon are the archetypes of the third phase of life. There are all the goddesses of wisdom, the goddess of compassion, the goddess of enough is enough. The image here, you have to go out of Greek mythology and into Kali and into Sekhmet, the lion-headed goddess of Egypt. When women get to the point where enough is enough, that's the archetype of transformative wrath. That is moderated because you are in the third phase of life. You know limitations. You know you can't just blurt it out. But you can work on the energy to help bring about changes in your family structure or in the world. These are all archetypes that become active in the third phase of life.

The Greeks did not have a goddess of compassion. They had the goddess of love and physical love and Aphrodite love. But by the time you're in the third phase, the goddesses of compassion are no longer just Greek goddesses. Kuan Yin, for example, who gives mercy to anyone who asks for it, is a third phase of life goddess. Interestingly, our Statue of Liberty, which is really Lady Liberty, is an image of the archetype of compassion. She who says, "Give me your tired, your poor, your teeming masses yearning to breathe free. I lift my torch beside a golden door." That was what America used to stand for before this immigration stuff comes in. You can hear my reaction to that which is a combination of

enough is enough and the archetype of compassion that can feel both what the mother is feeling, and the child is feeling when separated at the border. This is a kind of thing that moves us to action and activism. But by the time we're in a third phase of life, we also know about alliances. We know about power. We know a lot more about how to assertively work towards getting something done. One of the amazing things about being an American woman now is that the women who are postmenopausal have gone, first of all, there was the boomer generation that is now in their 60s, 70s, 80s. Those of us who are still here, we have had the opportunity of the women's movement, of sisterhood, of now being able to work together towards common goals.

I had written a book called *Crones Don't Whine* because it's an essential crossing between into the phase of a crone. A crone is an honored title in any culture that values the wisdom of the old woman. Interestingly enough, even in all the patriarchal cultures, wisdom is usually personified by a goddess, not a god. Here we are in the third phase. The trouble with the word "crone" is that it's been denigrated. Every word that has to do with empowered women gets denigrated. You know what happened. Feminism used to be a great word, and then it got considered a bad word. Women who stepped into the world that they could not have gone into prior to the women's movement would say, "Well, I'm going to be a doctor or a lawyer or do this, but I'm not a feminist." We who were part of the women's movement would mutter, how do you think you can do that now? It's because of feminism. Then right now, feminism has gotten to be a good word again which is quite wonderful.

Sabrina: Right. Thanks a lot for that.

Jean: Yes. Thank goddess for that.

Sabrina: Right, thank goddess for that, exactly. Jean, the whole notion of the crone as we enter our elder years, as you mentioned, people often shirk of the word "crone" and women too. I mean when they think of the crone, they think a lot of the physical aspects of what the crone looks like, with the gray hair. There's something going on inside as well in our psyche about why we don't accept the crone as this archetype. Can you describe ways that we can accept this archetype more in our own being as we grow older?

Jean: Well, one of the things is that we fortunately do not have to necessarily look like a dried-up old crone at all. The more we are involved with life and are physically active and care about what we look like, for example, partly it has to do with as we grow older and still feel young, we do make an effort to not look as old as we may be but as young as we actually feel. Fortunately, because of the huge wave of boomer women, there are all these products that you can use if you want to or not. We have this range of older women in looks and in appearances and in

what they do. You see the third phase of life is one in which you can reinvent yourself and be more authentic I think than any other time in your life. It's a time to bloom actually where you can now develop a part of yourself that you may have known something about when you were an adolescent, and then you did what was needed to be educated, to go to work, to have a family or not. Now, you have some opportunity to pursue an interest in art or in activism.

One of the major things about this phase of life is a necessity to be real. One of the things about talking about the archetypes in this phase of life, one is healing laughter. When you're a young woman, you hesitate to laugh sometimes, or you make yourself laugh. Somebody says a joke and there's a question about do you laugh; do you not laugh? When you laugh, it's not a full-bodied belly laugh by the time you get to be a crone age woman. You're real. I have a chapter in *Crones Don't Whine* that says crones laugh together. They can laugh, we can laugh about something going wrong in our body, for example. We share it, we don't dwell on it, but we actually can laugh and share a lot. I said that not whining is the crossover because so many women can be caught in that place where, as they enter menopause and realize that they no longer can do a lot of what they, first of all, I can no longer have a child. They've worked for a certain number of years, and it may be worked out or it didn't work out. Their relationships worked or didn't work out. Their children turned out or didn't turn out the way they wanted them to. You can sit at the threshold to the crone years and whine about what should have been, could have been, might have been, and be envious of other women. Yet there you are, you're still here. You're still healthy. You still have as many years of adulthood as you've already lived because we can now live until 90 fairly easily but certainly until 60, 70, 80. These are years that we have. The question is, what are we going to do with these years?

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I say that the Jungians talk about development from a deep place and refer to it as individuation. When I go to the UN and see with the women who are active there and most of them who are heading organizations are well into the third phase of their lives, I realized that they'd fulfilled three criteria which I call an assignment. Something came along that they were moved to do. The first one was it was meaningful to them. This meant that something about the lives they had lived made whatever this is that they have taken as what they want to do as meaningful. The second is that it will be fun because it is fun to do something of value with people who share your values and to work towards a goal that is worthy for you. The last is that it's motivated by love. Whenever anything is motivated by love, it's a different kind of energy. The energy of love is the more you give away, the more there is. The more you have, the more the others have, and the more there is. This kind of energy makes for activism that is heart centered. In an older woman who is practical and dedicated to what it is she's doing, she's picked up this assignment. It may be a very personal one that had to do with raising grandchildren when something happened to a parent, their child.

But maybe to take on a major cause because you experienced something of it yourself. When I met the women, who were heading anti-trafficking organizations and learned of their connection when they were younger to having been abducted in and gotten out of and now were turning around and helping others, this is this was meaningful. When you have something that's meaningful, fun and motivated by love, you're going to also stay young as you grow older, by the way.

Sabrina: Yes, because what we have cultivated in our inner capacities now become an outer expression and that aliveness, that vibrancy really comes forth. I can really see that. Thank you for those three assignments. I am definitely going to mark that down on my book, Jean.

Jean: Good.

Sabrina: Yeah, absolutely. It just comes to mind. I know we don't talk a lot about politics in this summit. Out of all of the archetypes, you have described a lot of archetypes, what archetypes would make a good president, a woman president? This was coming to mind as you were describing Lady Liberty and Kuan Yin and even Athena and Demeter. I mean I can see how all these archetypes can come into like a Mona Lisa of an archetype for a president. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are about that.

Jean: I think it has to do with being really a mature whole human being. One of the things that is essential is that you are able to maneuver in the persona world appropriately. You have a well-functioning ego that is in touch with this larger archetype which Jung called the largest self but which is translated into god or goddess or divinity or higher power, that the ability to be humbled by an awareness that you are not the center of the world, even if you're president of the United States of America, that yes, you have power but that power needs to be spiritual power. It needs to be possible to realize that what you set in motion will affect other human beings and the planet and life on this planet. If you cannot imagine, intuit, have compassion for what you set in motion, like I am appalled at what was happening at the borders, that the president and those people that were and are putting it into motion, it would be really more terrible if they could imagine. But I'm assuming that they did not imagine what it would be like to be the parent who is separated from her child or the child who is screaming out for mother and is being taken away. Now, that is such a basic thing to be able to imagine, the effect of action on other people. Compassion is an absolute necessity. But you also have to be strong and think clearly about strategies. One of those things about the archetypes is if you had the Artemis, the goddess of 100 moon who has both the mystical side and the ability to aim for a target and set it in motion, if you have Athena who is the best strategist of

any of the gods or goddesses and you also had compassion, together it would be a good combination.

Sabrina: Wow. That sounds really powerful. I'm going to be thinking about that in 2020 for sure.

Jean: You do need to face the truth. The first archetype of older women that I got to know was Hecate who, in the story of Demeter and Persephone, she has a very minor role. What she did was offer help to Demeter after her daughter Persephone was abducted into the underworld, and she did not know what happened to Persephone. Hecate said, "Come, let us go up to the god of the sun. He saw what happened. Let us find out the truth of it." Now, this is a wisdom that you get when you get older. When you're younger, you think, well, maybe it's not so bad. Maybe things will change. You get into a denial about wanting to know truly what happened. When you get to be an older person, the first thing you want to find out is the truth. That's really a good thing to remember to do.

Sabrina: But you also mentioned, I've heard you say before, Jean, that Hecate also the archetype of therapists, midwives, and witch and wise woman. Why do you say that? Is it because of this truth that you are saying?

Jean: Well, that's just one of her aspects. Her Greek title is goddess of the crossroads. If you were approaching a major crossroad in ancient Greece, you'd see a statue with three faces. One faces the road that brought you to this intersection, and the other two faces look down the two roads that were the choice that you might make at the intersection. When you get to the crossroads and the choice of what are you going to do next, and it's not just a choice of outer choices so that might be it. There are often choices of inner ones. Will you let go of some bitterness? Will you choose gratitude instead for the fact that you are still here and you're healthy and your mind is working and there are lots of folks your age who are not so lucky? What will you do at the crossroad?

Sitting with Hecate is the wise woman who does not judge you but can reveal the truth of the situation if you are receptive to it. It's the situation and it's who you are. That combination, if you can truly take in who you are and what the situation really is, then the decision you make will be a good one or a right one for the next steps. Now, a midwife knows the stages of labor, knows when the baby is about to crown, for example, knows when it's going wrong and helps. That is a quality of a therapist too that sees where you come from, what the childhood was like, what the problems were. A person comes and sits with the therapist. The therapist is not there to tell the person what they should do but to make it possible for that person to trust this place that is safe, this sanctuary, this temenos, where you can talk about what you have suppressed, what really

happened to you, and be at that crossroad position until it's clear, and then you know what you want to do next.

Sabrina: I really appreciate your full description of how this place at the crossroads can really empower us and really face the truth of what it is that we really believe in. I wonder, Jean, in your own life, what was challenging for you as you were entering your third act or your older years and perhaps what archetype was difficult for you to take on and what got you through it?

Jean: Well, I'm quite away through it, by the way. One of the major things is learning about reality and having a gratitude about it and making major decisions. I made major decisions based on what I felt in my bones. The Greeks had two words for knowledge. One was logos, what you know with your mind; and gnosis which is like gnostic, what you know in your heart or know in your bones. To make a major decision like leaving a marriage, which has a lot of good, had a lot of good, when that gnosis said it was time for me to leave and to know that now that I look back on it, how right it was and how I could not justify it with my mind. Later, when a diagnosis of a breast cancer came up to choose a straight lumpectomy and not go for the rest of it because I needed to actually walk my talk which I believed in because I had helped many women through this kind of experience and close to bone. Life-threatening illness is a soul journey. Again, it's what you know in your bones that is right therapy for you. I chose what was right for me which was one against the standard procedure. So far, so very good. Big things come up. That's part of the journey. Then it's what you do with that. It's not just actions, although I just gave two examples of actions. I think though that the major thing in my life has been more inner experiences in which from an inner standpoint, I chose my profession of medicine, for example.

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There is just a lot really about this isn't what I call a moment of truth that comes up over and over again in every woman's life. It's the moment of truth about all the major decisions, about relationship, about pregnancy, about illnesses, about family members, all kinds of things. There is what people expected you, and there's your inner, what you truly know to be true. Then there's a character and integrity that gets shaped by the decisions you make step by step by step and the need to also allow for mistakes. The work of psychotherapy has so much to do with forgiving and having compassion for the people in your life that did the wrong thing at the wrong time or whatever, but it also applies to you. You need to have compassion for yourself and forgive yourself for not being perfect. Those are inner major choices.

Sabrina: Jean, thank you so much. I was so touched by you describing your inner journey and the fullness of how you included the crossroads and the archetypes to make the difficult choices that you did and how vulnerable you must have felt through all that. I really, really appreciate that and how that can be incorporated in our

own journeys as women whether it's through a health crisis or just at a crossroads.

Jean: One of the things I had wanted to emphasize and hadn't was, everyone, find yourself a circle of support, a circle with a spiritual center that can meet throughout years of your life and help you through the major crises that will come up. We serve as role models for each other for one thing. We can laugh together. We can cry together. We can move through life with others who know us well enough and have our back. With the book *The Millionth Circle* and the movement of circles, I think this is something that every woman, especially in their third phase of life, should have.

Sabrina: Absolutely, yeah. You wrote the book *Millionth Circle* that is so essential I think for every woman to have because like the Me Too movement is kind of like a big circle.

Jean: Oh, it definitely is.

Sabrina: Right. I know archetypes are used as a sacred center of women circles as well, Jean. What archetype do you feel is at the sacred center of women circles?

Jean: Well, Hestia was the goddess of the hearth and goddess of the temple. She was not a goddess with an image and big myths. She was considered to actually be in the fire at the center of a round hearth. That is an image of light, of warmth, of the sources where you would cook food or nourishment. So that the fire, the center, the round hearth provided all of those symbolically. That is also the image of the mandala which the Tibetans used as a sacred image and which Carl Jung used as a symbol of the largest self, which is far more than our egos can ever really grasp that has to do with whatever god is, whatever goddess is, whatever the Tao is. Whatever it is that is somehow underlined the entire universe that we are a part of more than any of us could ever fully grasp, and yet being in touch with that makes all the difference in the world.

Sabrina: Yes, it's very much so. Jean, are there ways that you would suggest putting together a successful women circle? By successful, I mean creating a deep container for women to fully step into their tenderness and become the fullest expression and power of themselves. Is it like with different archetypes coming together so they can all individually share their gifts and collectively create something really powerful, or how do you go about creating a circle?

Jean: I think it would help to choose women in the circle for whom spirituality was important, women who are grownups, meaning that they're not whiners, that they've taken their lumps and continued through them. I think it's important they have women who can laugh and women who have a sense of humor. I'm

saying basically choose from the heart, heart connected to women. The decision, when a group comes together to consider, will they be a circle, to try it out and to be free to stay or to leave. The circle that is the most meaningful to me was started in the '80s. It has met every other week I think ever since then. We've had changes in the circle over time, of course, but the basic circle energy has remained. There are six of us in it. That's also a very good number, around that number. There are many different ways to select people in a circle. Sometimes it's just like you get two people together that say, "We really want to be in the circle." Who do you know that you would want to invite to come? The invitation is intuitive.

Sabrina: Do you lead the circle, Jean?

Jean: No. A circle is leaderless, although a number of circles begin with someone facilitating it, and they might even do it professionally as a circle leader. But the circle itself, once women in it get the hang of it, they don't need a leader. But they do need to have some shape to it. The creators of the Millionth Circle have been meeting online and about once a year in person because we're from all over. We started with the look that was a seed idea for a lot of what we've done since then. They had an organizing meeting. The book went to the Parliament of World Religions and inspired a small group, a handful of women, three of whom ended up heading NGOs at the UN. There were conversations about the idea behind the Millionth Circle. They talked about it and they thought about how to organize it. One of them who was in California called me up. I didn't know her. She told me what had happened with the little book and would I consider them using the title, the Millionth Circle, and would I consider coming to the first organizing meeting? That was in 2001. Then came the 9/11. In 2002, we had a group of about 20 plus women who met to further organize the idea of The Millionth Circle Initiative. Then we went to the United Nations which is how I got involved in working towards Fifth Women's World Conference.

Sabrina: Wow, that's amazing and so inspiring, Jean. I think just knowing that how something that started out small can really bloom into something bigger with even a bigger vision including more people and even institutions and organizations, that's really incredible. Thank you for sharing that, that example with us.

Jean: Oh, you're very welcome.

Sabrina: Jean, in our final minute that we have here in our time together, what final thought would you like to leave with us? Either about circles or about really stepping into our crone or whatever it is, what final thought would you like to leave our audience today?

Jean: It's a big question. I consider this whole experience of being a human being a soul journey from the time we come into this world, at this time in history into the particular family that we happened to come into that then either supported us with positive experiences or actually helped shape us by the negative ones. The rest of our life has to do with becoming who we came to be here, I think. I mean this is the basic notion of there being really a soul purpose and a purpose to life which I strongly believe to be true. I think that those of us are here now, especially women, I think it's up to women, truly up to women, to change the course of humanity and therefore the planet by bringing in what is innately more present in women than it is in men. That has to do with our different reactions to stress. There has never been a more stressful time in many ways than right now because human beings have the capacity to destroy everything or to evolve which is huge as a possibility. The men cannot do it because their relationship to stress is fight or flight. It's a hierarchy. It's about who is alpha to whom. We could see that being played out on the international and national theme right now.

Now, women respond to stress and the fight or flight reaction is an adrenaline and testosterone reaction. Women react to stress with an oxytocin and an estrogen reaction. The oxytocin reaction was originally called the hormone that was a maternal bonding hormone. But it means that when women are stressed, their reaction is to talk on, to hold others, to take care of households, and to share what they are stressed about in conversation through which problems can be solved. If they're heard, but in order to be heard, women have a balanced world instead of a hierarchical world. Again, the image needs to be circle where people do take charge of certain things because this is their job. But the basic idea of value is everybody is of value. The power over hierarchy is not a model that can be truly sustaining in any relationship of two or a family or actually the bigger world. I would say that every one of us, every one of us as a female gender, can make a difference where we are by valuing what we know and being able to have a perspective and compassion and humor, because there is something called tipping point critical mass that brought about the women's movement in 1970. I think something is happening now that it may be -- 1970 was the year of the woman. This may become the decade or the century of the woman if we could really bring this world into balance.

Sabrina: I love that idea. May it be so. Not just the decade but century, yes to that. Oh, my God. That is such a great idea. Jean, this has been incredibly empowering and so enlivening to hear, not only your experiences and your deep wisdom but also your vision on how we can take the world back into the feminine archetype and instead of making it hierarchical, make it like that of a circle. I love that vision. I just simply love that vision. Thank you for bringing all of that and more to our time together today.

Jean: You're welcome. I appreciate the opportunity.

Sabrina: I hope there will be more. I hope you join us again next year if we have one. Listeners, you can find Jean at her website, she has three of them, at jeanshinodabolen.com and also 5wcw.org. That's for the Fifth World Conference on Women. Finally, millionthcircle.org. Thank you, listeners, for joining us. I hope you were just as inspired as I was with Jean. We hope you bring this out into your world and know that you are incredible, and you can step into your croneness and not whining but smiling and empowering. Thanks, everyone. We'll see you on the next call.

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