

The Disempowerment of the Feminine

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Certainly our ancestors must have asked, as we do, "Where did we come from?" Prehistoric archaeological finds reveal numerous figures referred to as Goddesses – (Venuses, actually, but that is hardly accurate as they predated the vain goddess by centuries). The Palaeolithic goddess figures reveal a society that revered the powers of life giving (*Palaeolithic dates back 32,000 years*).

The myth of the Garden of Eden tells us there was a time and place where males and females lived in harmony. The ancient Greek poet Hesiod spoke of a time when a 'golden race' "tilled the soil in peaceful ease before a lesser race brought in their god of war."

Agrarian co-operative societies were overtaken by blade-wielding invaders – they taught their conquered that the powers of the sky gods superseded the powers of the Earth goddess.

According to Riane Eisler in the book, "The Chalice and the Blade": "There was a shift of emphasis from technologies that sustain and enhance life to technologies that destroy and dominate – a focus which threatens all life on the globe today."

Freidrich Engels was the first to link the shift from the agrarian life-giving mode to social stratification based on hierarchies and masculine domination over the feminine to the development of metallurgy – specifically copper and bronze. According to Engels, it was not metals per se, but rather their use in developing ever more effective technologies of destruction that played such a critical part in what Engels termed "the world historical defeat of the female sex."

The Kurgans were horsemen who moved across Europe in three waves. They brought with them their right by might and their sky gods – conquering the previous civilizations and enslaving all who could not defeat the usurpers – transferring their belief in the supreme sky god to their conquered. goddesses became consorts of the sky gods or were absorbed into new pantheons as war goddesses or were disempowered by rape and degradation. (*Pantheon is a collection or group of gods and goddesses in a particular religious or mythical structure. Examples are: Greek pantheon, Roman pantheon, Egyptian pantheon, Teutonic pantheon, etc.*)

The great goddess of fertility, this mighty mother of all grace and knowledge, from whom all growing things spring forth became the mother of the gods. She became the womb of the gods.

There was once a myth of the Babylonian goddess, Ishtar, originally a goddess of fertility.

Her spouse, Tammuz, god of all growing things, was captured by the dragon of chaos, Tiamat and taken to the underworld. Unless Tammuz was returned all crops would die and eventually so would all the humans. So Ishtar descends to the underworld. The gates are shut to her, but she fiercely demands to be allowed in or she would tear down the gates and set loose the dead onto the earth's surface. Her determination so impressed Eriskagel, the goddess who ruled the underworld, that Ishtar was allowed past the first gate. There follow a series of gates and at each one Ishtar must divest herself of all that she carries. Her crown, her jewels, her belt ... until finally, at the seventh gate, she must give over her garment. All who appeared before Eriskagel, goddess of the Underworld, must do so naked. Having surrendered these trappings of power to regain her mate, Ishtar impressed Eriskagel and was allowed to depart with Tammuz.

Holy documents were changed and edited to reveal this new truth – the biblical mythology on which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are based was again sifted, edited, and added to by a

group of Hebrew priests identified by bible scholars as the Priestly school or the P team – this was to distinguish them from earlier re-mythers, such as the Elohim or E School.... or the.... Jahweh or J School.....

The P team's aim, according to Biblical scholars who annotated the Dartmouth Bible, was to "translate into reality the blue print for a theocratic state."

(Definition of theocracy – governing of a state by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided – Webster's 9th Edition, pg. 1221.)

"The quantity and nature of this late contribution by the Priestly authors surprise those unfamiliar with their work. Many scholars ascribe to the Priestly team:

11 chapters out of the 50 in Genesis

19 in the 40 of Exodus

28 of the 36 in Numbers

as well as the whole of Leviticus" (pg. 86 C and the B)

Myths were written to enforce the new regime.

The Tree of Life and the serpent were universally attributed to the Earth goddess – in the myth of the Garden of Eden, we see a woman offered the knowledge of the world (which was her right under the goddess) in the form of these two symbols – the serpent offering the knowledge of the world to the woman in the form of the fruit of the tree of knowledge... yet this wisdom and power is now the province of the sky god who has forbidden the humans to know these things. When the female reaches for the wisdom of the serpent, which has always been the bearer of knowledge to her gender, and embraces its advice and eats from the knowledge of the tree of life, she is damned.

Genesis 3: 16 states: "Unto woman he said,

'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee.' "

The burden of bringing original sin to the world is placed squarely upon her head and now even the act of childbirth is considered unclean – whereas once it was known to be a re-enactment of the wonder of creation, a direct gift of the life giving forces of the universe which were once symbolized by the goddess.

Leviticus 12 gives us the recipe to cleanse a woman after she has given birth:

verse 2: if she hath given birth to a male child she shall be unclean 7 days

verse 5: if she bear a maid child ...she shall be unclean two weeks...

The chapter goes on to list what sacrifices she must make to purify herself from the act of giving birth.

The ancient tale of the capture of the Babylonian god of growing things – Tammuz – is retold and now it is the son of Tammuz (no longer Ishtar) that traverses to the underworld to save his father. Ishtar is relegated to the "little lady" waiting at home for the return of her brave men.

This rewriting of myth sets the groundwork to justify the suppression of the feminine – it is the conceptual underscoring of imbalance of power between the male and the female which is still imbalanced in this century.

In Norse myth, the sky gods or Aesir, led by Odin, arrive on the 'golden plain'. Odin was the leader of the Aesir in the city of Asgard. They judge the golden plain worthy and decide that they shall live there. They begin to choose the places where they will set up their halls. But the golden plain is already inhabited, by a group of nature deities called the Vanir.

As the sky gods set up camp, a representative is sent from the Vanir to meet the new neighbours. The messenger is a powerful witch known as Gulveig and, for her efforts, she is killed by Odin and his party. The saga itself offers no explanation for this killing. Gulveig is said to have arrived, and then her powers are described, and then she is speared and thrown upon the fires.

When the Vanir attempt to invoke the law to rectify this, Odin's Aesir are told they must either recompense the Vanir for the loss of their member or there will be war.

The Aesir consult amongst themselves and decide they would prefer war. Mighty battles are waged and, when the dust settles, a peace is made. According to Viking law – the two parties have an exchange of chiefs. This is an old tradition which sees important men from each tribe being exchanged. This means that the two tribes are now kin and must no longer war upon each other. This deal sees the Vanir trading the god of the sea, Njord, and his son Frey, the god of crops, over to the Aesir. (What the Vanir are traded in exchange is another story in itself – let's just say it's not a fair trade.)

This is clearly the myth of a usurping sky god pantheon moving into an agrarian area and melding their sky god beliefs in with the pre-existing spiritual system. The two most important gods of the Viking nature pantheon are now Aesir and fall under the command of the All-father Odin.

As one looks at the Norse pantheon, it appears among the Aesir, the goddesses are all wives of important gods – except for the lore or knowledge keeper, Saga, who is kept alone in her own hall where only Odin is allowed to visit with her.

Even the Valkyrie, who are the mighty warrior goddesses that transport the fallen warriors to the side of their god, Odin – even the Valkyrie are the only women allowed in his drinking hall of Valhalla and there they are relegated to the capacity of serving wenches. These **goddesses** serve beer and food to fallen male humans/mortals.

As the sky god worshippers continued to dominate – women were removed from positions of power and replaced by men. We see in the records of old Sumeria that any new role of power or responsibility was given to a man, and slowly the old positions of power held by women were replaced by males.

In the forward to the Gnostic gospels, Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt is quoted in this observation: "When the patron of the scribes changed from a goddess to a god, only male scribes were employed in the temples and palaces, and history began to be written from an androcentric perspective." (*Androcentrism is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing male human beings or the masculine point of view at the center of one's view of the world and its culture and history.*)

Women became property – first of their fathers and then of their husbands. The Book of Deuteronomy lists at length the ways to determine the worth of a female depending on whether or not she is a virgin and how she is to be disposed of if she is no longer so (because if she is not a virgin she cannot be sold for a decent dowry to a husband).

And so the groundwork is laid for centuries of domination over the feminine. Laws and customs are designed to keep her exhausted in unending childbearing and social restrictions of her movements and her opinions. This reign of terror continues through the next centuries, including the witch burnings. This event in feminine history made it very clear that the patriarchal overlords were not going to tolerate any women who wanted to live outside their model.

The crime of speaking her mind is punishable by public shaming. A crime called "Communis Rixatrix" (note the Latin feminine is used here as only women can be charged with this crime). The translation of Communis Rixatrix is "the common scold."

According to Jacob's Law Dictionary, a common scold is a "troublesome and angry woman, who, by her brawling and wrangling amongst her neighbours, breaks the public peace."

The punishment for the speaking of one's mind was to be publicly ducked, that is, to be placed on a 'ducking stool' and plunged into a nearby body of cold water in the presence of her whole community. The last time a woman was indicted as a common scold in the United States was in 1971.

A woman named Marion Dunlevy was arrested, fingerprinted, and indicted as a common scold after engaging in an argument with two of her male neighbours over a parked car. The case was thrown out but "Communis Rixatrix" was still on the books in the United States in 1994.

With even this small trail of evidence it seems difficult not to become downhearted about the fate of the feminine. Yet, is it so?

The temples of the goddess were pulled down, but the holy places on which they stood now bore the temples of the sky gods.

In Ireland, the churches of the Christian gods are inexplicably decorated with a symbol called the Sheela-na-gig. Used as a type of gargoyle, we see grinning or leering down from the walls of these churches a large breasted, sometimes skeletal faced woman, holding open her vagina with both hands. This image of a woman holding open her vagina seemed incongruous to the androcentric (or male-centered) religion, but there she is. Somehow that goddess image keeps cropping up, just as somehow the power of the feminine kept growing up through the cracks of the patriarchal pavement.

In a "thou shalt have no other gods before me" religion, we find a tremendous number of women who pray to the mother of the god. The worship of Mary is allowed, but only because she is the sacred womb that birthed the son of god. As the vessel of the divine it is acceptable to pray to her, to seek her guidance, and to consider her sacred. The sacred mother goddess disguised as the womb of the divine god.

Here is a particularly powerful story of the holy goddess reaching for her people through the new paradigm of the acceptable mother goddess.

In the 1500s there was a simple man in Mexico named Juan Diego, a farm labourer and weaver. A man of simple means, Juan got up before the sun every day to walk 15 miles to go to Mass in what is now Mexico City.

Each day he passed Tepeyac Hill which had once been the site of a great temple attributed to the goddess. On this winter's day, Juan Diego heard music from the hill. Looking up, he saw a glowing cloud encircled by a rainbow. From within this vision came the sweetest voice he had ever heard. She called to him from the top of the hill. And there he saw a lovely woman dressed like an Aztec princess. When he asked her who she was she told him she was the Virgin Mary.

She asked Juan Diego to go to the Bishop and ask the Bishop to build a church on Tepeyac Hill. She said, "I vividly desire that a church be built on this site, so that in it I can be present and give my love, compassion, help, and defense, for I am your most devoted mother... to hear your laments and to remedy all your miseries, pains, and sufferings."

And so the simple labourer took this request to the Bishop, who was indulgent of the tale but did not take it seriously – especially since Juan Diego reported he had been amazed to see that the Virgin Mary was clearly Mexican!

The Bishop told Juan Diego he would require proof.

Before the poor man could return to Tepeyac Hill, his uncle fell ill. As Juan rushed to the Bishop's church to fetch a priest, the Mary apparition came to him and told him not to worry. She had cured the uncle.

Now she instructed Juan Diego to climb to the place where the two of them had first met. Off he went to the top of the hill, and there, in the frozen soil, he found flowers were flourishing. He gathered these flowers in his cloak and took them at once to the Bishop, for here was his proof.

He told the story to the patient Bishop and he opened his cloak to pour forth the gifts of the Virgin Mary. The Bishop was amazed to see that the flowers were Castilian roses, as this flower did not grow in Mexico. But what the Bishop could not deny was the glowing image of the lady that was imprinted on the inside of Juan Diego's cloak.

A church was built on Tepeyac hill not long after this event. Our Lady Guadalupe, as she is known, was declared the patroness of the Americas.

The ancient goddess once more had a temple upon her holy place and people gathered there to sing worship.

And so we see that the ancient power of the goddess and of the feminine has not been destroyed, merely trampled underfoot. Left to her own devices, and properly fertilized by patriarchal patronization, she stirs underfoot and continues to grow around the obstructing laws and the re-mything of her glory.

In Norse myth we find that there was one goddess among the Aesir who was not simply the wife of a god. It seems one Vanir goddess came to live among the sky gods along with her father Njord, god of the sea, and her twin brother, Frey, god of the crops.

Freyja, goddess of passion and battle, somehow was tossed into the exchange of chiefs and came to live among the Aesir. She had many powers, but the one that interested Odin was the power of Seidr, a woman's magic that was not taught to men. The reason this power was kept to the women was that it allowed one to see the future.

The Vikings believed that the future was set just as the past was set. No one, not even a god, could change what was to be. Past attempts of teaching Seidr to the men had shown the Vikings that men could not see the future without attempting to change it – and to thwart the path of fate was to invite tragedy.

One sentence in the sagas tells us that Freyja taught this women's magic to the All-father. In exchange for this power, Freyja is given unprecedented leverage within the pantheon. She receives half of all warriors that the Valkyrie carry to the realm of the gods. She is made the leader of the Valkyrie. In one myth, the Aesir use her to bargain for their wishes and when they tell her she must marry a giant so that the deal can be completed, her rage raises the roof of her hall. A hasty plan must be put in place to fool their opponent into thinking he will have his way with the goddess.

She is not forced to marry against her wishes. Her will is allowed. The gift of Seidr, given to the All-father, allows him to foresee his downfall. He, predictably, takes actions to prevent this fate and puts into motion the very path he wishes to avoid.

And, speaking of fate, somehow the goddesses of fate remain independent goddesses as well. In Norse myth, the Norn (*any of the three Fates or goddesses of destiny*) sit by a river along the roots of the World Tree. Before he gains the power to seek the future himself through the forbidden magic of Seidr, Odin would go every day to consult them. They were outside his control. The Greek Fates or Moerae were similarly outside the control of the gods.

So, though overt control has been applied to the feminine, she seems to slip through the fingers as the grip tightens. And though terrible war has been waged upon her heart and her soul, she continues to rise up for she knows her gifts and she knows the cycle of nature is beyond the control of any human law.

As a tree will grow around a fence, feminine power continued to exist in the earth and in the souls of humanity, and in the growth of all things. Woman learned to adapt.

She was restricted from achieving power in her own right and so she chose men to empower. Think of the saying, "behind every good man is a good woman."

And though we have looked at this on the external up to now, I put it to you that these restrictions, which have limited the female from exerting her place in the world, have also created a division within the very soul of humanity.

Such values as compassion and nurturing have been relegated to the feminine – which is synonymous, in the patriarchal model, with weakness, with vulnerability, which leaves one open to be attacked. In fact, in the ancient patriarchal model, to be feminine in any way invites attack.

So now our men are estranged from their own interiors much the same way men have become estranged from the women in their lives. They say they don't understand women and that is because they are taught to divorce themselves from the feminine part of themselves, the nurturing, gentle part, that lives within, then they are destined to seek the feminine aspect through their partner.

Though he is acculturated to claim he does not seek these trappings of weakness, the typical male searches for nurturing and grace his whole life in his desire for, and then control of, his woman.

Inside us each is the masculine (expressive part) and the feminine (receptive part). To live a balanced life of receptivity and of expression we need for both sides to be supported and encouraged so that each portion of self can be strong.

It is for each of us to teach ourselves to not look to the external to find those parts we feel we lack, but to plant the seeds of those qualities in ourselves and to nurture them along.

Recall the story of Juan Diego and the Virgin Mary on Tepeyac Hill. This is not a woman who returns the ancient goddess to Mexico. It was a man; a man whose heart was open and true.

And here we are. In an age where many women of this world can choose who they marry – or even IF – they marry at all. Women are able to make choices about when they give birth. They are even able to have children through artificial insemination and raise these children without having to have a husband. Even 50 years ago, in enlightened North America, these things were unheard of.

Men are seeking their hearts and souls on journeys within in unprecedented numbers. They are looking to the females in their lives as sources of assistance and wisdom. They are seeking their own internal feminine aspects and finding themselves to have wisdom of their own – when they can still themselves enough to listen to the voice of her within them.

It is an exciting time to be human. And certainly, as each gender becomes more balanced in their masculine and feminine parts of self, it will be an exciting time to be here on the Earth.

Meditation

I invite you to take a journey within now to awaken your feminine power – the goddess within. We will do a meditation now, and I will talk you through this journey.

Please prepare to meditate...

Close your eyes.

Allow yourself this time to relax and to re-energize.

Allow yourself to get comfortable and be quiet for the next ten minutes or so.

Sometimes we just need to give ourselves permission to take a few moments for ourselves – to gift ourselves with quiet time.

And take a deep breath in now, inhale deeply, and exhale

And inhale, and exhale

And inhale, and exhale

Begin now to make your connection to the Universe, to Source.

In whatever way you do this, simply know that you are connecting to the awesome power and love of the Universe and love the Universe, love your Source as you are loved by that same Source.

Feel yourself filled with this most powerful love and return that love in recognition of your connection to the power of the Universe. Really allow yourself to be loved by the Universe and know that the love you feel for the Universe amplifies the love that you are given in return by the Universe.

Now, send love to the Earth and as you send love to the Earth take note that the Earth is returning the love, in honour and recognition of you, as a being of this great planet. Feel how loved you truly are.

Know that by loving the planet Earth, you are helping to heal the Earth and in return the Earth gifts you with a gift of renewal and awakening in this time of celebration of love. This time of renewal. Feel yourself infused with a sense of well being and a sense of aliveness. As you connect to all the energy systems that you know.

And now, as you are connected to Spirit and thus you are receptive and awake and prepared to share this love and energy that you are filled with/ as the expression of love. Really begin to feel the joy and power that exists within this most holy occurrence.

In this most holy experience go now to a place deep within yourself that is a special loving space, your place of peace, of joy. You are connected to Source and the love and light is coursing through you and naturally out into the world.

Begin now, to make your way towards a cave. It is near by so just make your way over there. There is some overgrowth around its mouth, but you can easily pull that away to reveal what appears to be ancient stonework. Humans have enhanced this natural cave. Are those petroglyphs around the opening?

You enter into the cave, and as you do so a torch flares to light beside you illuminating a short tunnel into a wider cavern. There in that cavern you find yourself in another torchlit area. There is a waterfall that supplies a small pool at the center of the room. A cool breeze wafts past you from the entrance, which is close by. Though you are enclosed, there is a safety and knowledge that there is easy traverse out and back into this cavern.

At the back of the cavern, there is an image of the goddess. The repository of the ancient power of the feminine. Take note of the tools in her hands, for they will have information for you about your own gifts. As you look up at her, realize that she is looking down at you. When your eyes meet, she smiles, for you have awakened her. Look into those eyes and feel the gratitude that you have sought her, the welcome for you... here in her holy place.

She speaks in your language, telling you to look onto the surface of the pool so that you might see yourself as she sees you. So look onto the surface of the pool and see, displayed there, your gifts or talents. Know as you look at yourself how the goddess esteems your heart and soul. Know she finds you worthy.

Let yourself be filled with peace, here where she has always been. You are most welcome here at anytime to replenish your strength and harness your creativity.

Glance back to her and she speaks to you, a special message to assist you alone. And then she speaks to you once more, in the words of Guadalupe, and she speaks of your heart...

"I vividly desire that a holy place be built on this site, so that in it I can be present and give my love, compassion, help, and defense, for I am your most devoted mother... and I wish to assist you with all your burdens."

Her hand emerges from the wall, offering the tool or the gift that you saw her holding when you entered the cavern.

You return to her so that you may receive your gift. She assures you that she is always here and that you may seek her here at any time for support or advice or simply to bask in her eternal unconditional love for you. And then she gives you a seed, a seed of hope or of love or of whatever gift you might bring to the world. She asks you to plant that seed when you go out into the warmth and light- so that all her children can enjoy the quality it will engender. Make your farewells and make your way out of the cave. Return to your starting place.

Feel your hands and feel your feet ... and return to the room now, opening your eyes when *you* are ready.

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