

Embodied Feminism The Way Of The Feminine Woman

I remember the days when I began to awaken as woman and, left behind the innocence of childhood. I felt a surge from deep within me, I felt an ecstatic electric feeling in my body, I felt alive, radiant and I knew something was exploding inside. I began to feel that this thing within me was something that all men wanted, and I believed that if I was to be a true woman I would offer it as a gift. Soon it became obvious to me that this precious thing that was budding within was certainly wanted, and that it was equally true that if I went out ready to share it, it was going to be snatched and consumed, and not receive the honouring and respect it deserved. In other words I was going to be the sacrificial lamb.

Fortunately I soon learned the game, and that if I was to survive in this man's world, I needed to protect that which I valued the most. I traveled a long windy road before I realized what it meant to be a young woman living in our western culture. I learned to hide my inner world, and created a front, an outer shell to help me get by. It took me years of education to master the art of pretending, which I later spent two decades painstakingly uprooting - removing the conditioning that had kept me separate from all that is true and alive within me and others.

That early surge of pure body aliveness was kept seated in classrooms, learning facts and figures to develop my brain. My body was exercised to keep it a fit and supple machine, but my heart, my feelings, and deep intuitive knowing, well - no one seemed to talk about those. All matters of the heart took second place, and all lived quietly inside me. For the most part, the unspoken rule was clear (except for the occasional outburst of feelings, which were usually unconscious and out of control) – although anger was OK (mainly for men), grief, and pain in general, was to be abolished and treated as something to be fixed and controlled.

I learned that the core imperative of Patriarchy is to repress feeling, exert control through the mind, and strive toward perfection in order to get recognition and worth. Well, you may say, that is fair enough - it is the ego imperative to find identity in the world. But isn't the ego supposed to be a structure that protects the soft core that holds our depth, not something cut off from it. So the ego lives on from early childhood to later life, and for most of us, it seems to be our way of coping, and blocks us off from our hearts' hidden existence.

All our education prepares us to focus on the outer, and the inner is left aside to find its own way. I for one became a seeker of meaning, exploring beyond our materialistic, narcissistic, complacent 20th century reality. So from my late teens I was in India seeking an Eastern philosophy to point toward the missing piece. I spent years searching through male organized traditions to find inner freedom, God, enlightenment, and higher states of consciousness, and even though I touched the heights and found profound meaning in Buddhism, Yoga and various meditation practices, none of them addressed the experiences of body-aliveness I'd had back in my teens.

For the last 5000 years most human civilizations have been patriarchal in one way or another, but the fact is that modern Patriarchy and its scientific revolution, has alienated us from the feminine deeper than ever before. The women's liberation movement, instigated by the amazing courage of many women and men fighting passionately for what we take for granted today, offered women their human rights, and socio-economic possibilities and choices that none of our foremothers could have dreamed of. But the equality of women in modern society is only a doorway through which we can now begin to reclaim the radiant fierce aliveness of the deep feminine.

The Core Of Patriarchy

Gradually, by my early twenties, I lost contact with that feminine essence in my body. In order to belong I came under the spell of Patriarchy. Patriarchy is a way of interpreting our existence. If I was to name the aspect of Patriarchy that has had the biggest consequences in terms of the collective crises we are experiencing today, I would say it was the prioritizing of mind over body. And if I was to make a list of what is valued in patriarchy, and what has been repressed, it would look like this:

Mind over body
Logos over Eros
Will to power over will to love
The universal over the particular
God over humanity
Masculine over feminine
External over internal
Right over left
Consciousness over unconscious
Heaven over earth
Spirit over matter
Doing over being
Order over chaos
Pleasure over pain
Perfection over imperfection
Structure over flow
Division over unity
Centralism over diversity
Linear over cyclical

The words on the right (right brain) represent the feminine, which has been silenced, and the disturbances we see in today's world are the consequences and symptoms of the masculine/feminine split. Women were allocated the body, matter, the particular, the individual and Eros - and men took the rest. Women were dumb, their work was silenced, their instinct and intuition was unknown, undeclared, unexpanded, and illegitimate. Women became objects (bodies) for men, the subjects (minds).

Today's women have obtained social equality, but although we are now voting, driving cars, and have almost equally paid jobs, we are still breathing, talking, and moving within a paradigm that is patriarchal in its essence. What that has meant and still means for women, is that in order to have power in a manmade world, we need to value and develop what is most valued on men's maps. Many of us, in order to survive, are behaving like men in drag, while others still play the male-defined Cindy role of the submissive, perfect doll.

During my years in India I learned to disembodify, and to transcend feelings and sensations, using the powers of higher knowledge held by the Lamas. I was even told by my teachers that women, in order to get enlightened, needed to create enough good enough karma to reincarnate as a man. I could recount endless events that pointed out how, as woman, I was still an inferior - and that if I wanted power I had to be more like a man. In those days, I certainly tried my very best!

What I am pointing towards is the fact that what we need to unveil, for the most part, still remains underground. The feminine within (all of the qualities on the left hand side of the list above) - her true original creative thinking, her voice, her feeling and depths - is still silenced. We can see it in

sexuality, medicine, law, birth, death, and education – they have all become gradually dehumanized in service of progress.

I don't reject our history. Don't get me wrong! I deeply honour men and the masculine. I love their productivity, their direction, their doing capacity, their ability to direct and be fast. I love the power and clarity of thought, philosophy, knowledge, the sciences. I love the command of men, their virility and their courage, and I respect all that we have built over the last millennia: but we need to embrace what we have neglected. Perhaps the current eco-socio-political crisis is a turning point, and a new paradigm is calling us forth.

This feminine is a universal principle, it lives within men and women, within the animal and vegetable kingdoms. Women, due to their biology, have a privileged affinity with it, as men tend to have an affinity with the masculine. I've come to feel that progress was perhaps what we needed, and so the feminine needed to be repressed, and yet my heart says that we can't go any further without reclaiming what has been rejected along the way. The split now lives deep within us all. We are all busy repressing the feminine.

I often hear people talking about the Great Mother, the Goddess using the better/worse language of the patriarchal paradigm. And recently I've been getting a lot of e-mails attempting to bring value to women by demeaning and making fun of men. At the same time, the whole penis enlargement syndrome is a reflection of the shaky masculinity experienced by men as women now bring their own dose of testosterone into the home, and to work. But all of this just further perpetuates the split, and the dualistic superior/inferior, persecutor/victim perspective.

After two decades reclaiming and rehonouring the feminine, I have now come to feel radically feminine. By this I mean radically free to be what I am, which is the first challenge. I feel free to be, and 'being' is a continuous infinite flow - today I feel this, and tomorrow I'll feel different, and I will be thinking a little differently. Freedom is to allow myself all these changes, to let myself flow, even though thoughts say 'I am expected to be more or less the same'. Our patriarchally conditioned thoughts tell us to hold a posture, an ideology, and a role, and to remain bound by abstract definitions. These set definitions are rooted in fear, and attempt to control the inevitable flow of life.

You may be thinking that holding a position, and a role, is crucial - otherwise we'd have inner and outer anarchy. I am not advocating amputating the masculine pole, what I am pointing out is the loss we experience when we hold one position forever - without the ever-changing sensual motion of direct experience, and knowing how to move with differences and respond with flexibility. The truth is that we need them both. We need two legs to walk on the earth, and similarly we need to feel the love and the thinking, the ground and the goal, we need to pay attention and walk on the earth and be open to spirit. We see this flow in nature, a constant change - evolving patterns that are held within a cohesive whole. The only thing that doesn't change is change.

In order to allow this flow I needed to be in direct immediate contact with my inner world, my body with its five senses, my organs, my heart, my uterus, my feelings, my sensing, my mind. Gradually, as I began to trust and listen to the sum total of an experiencing BODY that was telling me, not everything, but everything I needed to know, moment to moment, I began to reconnect with that early erotic presence I had felt back in my teens. I came to feel the downward pull of the earth's beating earth once again - giving me the safety, the fire, and the belonging, that I had learned to look for in others and in external experience.

Life from this embodied perspective becomes a real co-creative act. This co-creative act bridges both my inner and my outer realities. The embodied feminine experience rests beyond duality, embracing differences as an essential ingredient of the dance of apparent duality. We need to learn to think

viscerally, and bring our thinking to the heart. Bridging all those learned apparent splits we can return to flow within and without.

What Is The Feminine Exactly?

Over the last few years I have been teaching a 7000 year old dance. This dance empowers women through experiencing our bodies as a source of spiritual knowledge. We learn to root this knowledge deeply in our bodies - for personal and global evolution. Through this dance we can return the over-masculinised body, and over-emphasized mind of western civilization into harmony with our innate intelligence that can connect with the intelligence of the plants, minerals, animals and elementals as well as each other. We learn to once again feel deeply, and conduct our energy. It is so moving to witness women becoming radiant, connected to their subjective sexuality, and hear their hearts speaking their deep knowing in the moment – fresh, spontaneous, and alive.

So Where To Look For The Feminine?

The feminine is that ache that you felt yesterday, and you didn't know why.

It's in the discomfort we feel in visiting a friend, or our mother.

Is in that shy, silent doubt that comes when you think about your wedding, your work, your profession.

It's in the thinly veiled will to do something that you are not even thinking about doing, and that you are not allowed to do.

The feminine is hidden in the artificiality we use when we are with such and such a person.

It's knocking when we feel anxiety, in the sleepless nights, in the depression, and in the sudden rise of sadness.

It's in that pain we are not willing to feel.

It's inside the addiction we feel trapped in.

It's in the explanations and diversions that we create to run from an inner experience that is causing us pain.

It's in the distortions we create in order not to admit the naked truth that wants to free us.

It's like those birth contractions that eventually pass, and yet leave us changed and different.

It's in the body that is asking for care, and yet we are not able to escape the routine.

It's crying silently in the little attention we pay to our dreams.

It's screaming against the fear, the fear - the fear of change, fear of getting it wrong, fear of shame, fear of our aloneness.

It's in the deep disappointment after intercourse that has not delivered the promise of love's deepest blessings.

It's in the sobbing when we remain unseen, untouched by beauty, by life, by others.

It's every incomplete breath that keeps us away from the earth's frequency, from our roots, and from what we are feeling.

We are in Patriarchy every time our words do not match what we really feel and want.

We are in Patriarchy when we maintain within the separation between body and mind.

We are in Patriarchy when we deliver beautiful speeches (about the earth, the goddess and the feminine), and we do not identify them in our daily lives, our feelings, our relationships, our thoughts.

We are in Patriarchy when we do not bring consciousness to our dark sides.

When we close one eye we are accomplices in maintaining the structures that close us in pre-established ways.

We are affirming Patriarchy when we become separate from the world, living only our own private lives, caring for 'our things', we are colluding when 'for love' we accept a role, and we become silent.

This uncomfortable internal buzzing inside us is the serpent of the deep feminine reclaiming her sacrifice – it is asking you to stop and look for yourself. She is with you, and she loves you with humility, passion and clarity. The naked truth is that to be alive is not a romantic, pink adventure (this is the illusion, the veil that has been pulled over our eyes). The fact is that birth hurts and our entry into the world is full of blood and mess and guts. To grow, and to become, hurts. Yes, it is painful to lose our innocence, and yet I feel that what causes the most pain is our romantic attachment to life in pink, and our valuing pink romantic perfection over and above the wisdom of being fully alive.

I remember throughout my childhood reclaiming the lies with the truth - and never understanding why they presented things to me in such way. I would rather have known what was real from the start - to see women giving birth, and to receive honouring and gifts from those who cared for me (rather than some abstract figure like 'father christmas'). Every fairy tale points us towards that moment of betrayal on the hero or heroine's journey when innocence is lost, and they have to meet the dark, the pain, the less-than-pink reality.

Despite being constantly put to sleep and filled with some superimposed fantasy from our early childhood, we receive deep blows. We can't forever blame our parents for not giving us the tenderness we needed. Their situation was often even harder. From the feminine perspective I like to look at true innocence as the tenderness in our heart that wants to love, and insist on loving, no matter how hard the blows, and how many. The question is how can we become stronger, and learn the lessons of living without losing our tenderness - without developing a shell that makes us impenetrable to life, and the love we are.

And is this not exactly what we have overlooked and undervalued - all that is indispensable for maintaining the tender and radiant heart we are? The pain of growing up held in the feminine offers us the possibility to discriminate, to learn to love more effectively, and use the finite time of our life in the best possible way, within the complex conditions we find ourselves in. The Greek myths talk about the tribulations of the gods. To me they speak to us of the awakening to a fully embodied humanity, in and through the painful journey that is experienced by the gods and goddesses we are.

What Are We Choosing To Nourish?

Why create new models? Are women nurturers? We are all nurturers when we open to the feminine. Some of us nurture consumerism, football, beer, celebrity magazines, Playboy, etc.. Some of us nourish new values. It's a question of choice, and in order to choose we need to be conscious of what we are doing - of the consequences of our actions, choices and perspectives. We need to become conscious of how the way we think and live is impacting the world. The days of theological discussion about God as an abstract entity, as universal but absent from the particular are coming to an end. Now that's what I would call mental masturbation - it can give pleasure, but it bears no fruit.

We are now called to have an erotic mind and a thinking heart - thoughts that touch us viscerally and are rooted in our experience, rather than abstract thoughts that have nothing to do with what we feel. This thinking nourishes our capacity to feel both the pain and the joy, to be with the pain of others and the world - without quick answers and actions that cut us from the heartfelt action, the action that comes from being intimate with another.

As women and man we need to become conscious of 'the silent other' inside us, the one we have ignored for so long - the one who converses with us in the unknown, the one who sends messages, sensations, warnings, sudden intuitions, unwanted thoughts, and others that save us. Only when we enter true dialogue with ourselves, is true dialogue with others possible. Prior to that there is only

prefabricated meeting according to roles, lifestyles, and similar mindsets - we do not meet as free beings, alive in the movement, original, and free.

As I turned my attention to the deep feminine, to my inner, I discovered that I was not always beautiful and good. I found my ashes, the dark that is human - and if it was in me, it was in all of us. As I have come to trust all seasons, all cycles, I am beginning to place equal amount of weight on both legs and my walking is becoming graceful, effective and connected. It is the way we think and love that changes our lives and the world. Entering the feminine means reading what the fullness of our body is saying to us moment to moment, and hearing what is needed in the moment. This way of dialoguing moves us on from the alienation of the abstract thinking map, into a deep intimate connection with the whole.

Embracing The Feminine - A Relational Paradigm

Up until now as women we have been in service of patriarchal values mediated by men. We have served the men, who are serving the 'superior objectives' that generate our history, by giving them the material conditions and affection they need so that they can rule. Today things are a little agitated, and we are witnessing a long process of historical transition, but to fully embrace truly embodied values it's going to take generations. Our hearts know that we are not bystanders to evolution, that we are evolution itself, and that we are co-creating it right now. As much as we are encouraged by new trends to live 'in the now', our lives do not arise just from this moment. The ground that we've walked collectively is the foundation upon which we walk today.

Women were that ground. The world that they governed was the soil for the evolution of human cultures, and with it human consciousness. That ground is the arms of the mother, the cradle, the home, the gathering and holding, the affection, the food, the clean cloths, the listening, the patience, the perseverance, the strength of character, the faith, the confidence, the docility, the beauty, the flesh, the continuity of the species, the base, the earth that begs for reverence and acknowledgement.

As women, more than ever, we are now called to listen to our bodies, and to notice when we're acting out the same mechanisms that are oppressing us. We need to trust that the body is speaking to us. The body symptomizes, and feels all that has not been given voice. As women we have forgotten to trust and value what we feel. Men do the same (multiplied by a hundred), since they have been forbidden to have any dialogue with their e-motions and feelings - they have even been forbidden to feel them. My husband and I run an organization called The Culture Of Honouring Project. We run courses for men, women and couples - to empower both the masculine and feminine to bring about this paradigm shift.

In general it's the women who tend to somatize (express symptoms through the body) the dis-ease in our intimate relationships. We were sharing this work with one couple in which the woman tended to suffer from headaches, which she came to identify as 'her screaming to the unexpressed in the relationship'. Her man always suggested that it was her problem, and that she should take a paracetamol. For the first few years she'd complied, until she decided to listen to her headaches and stop the pain killers. She began to express her fear of him, and the passive-aggressive energy he sprayed around the house, while disguised as good nice man. Eventually the eruption happened, he exploded, and the headaches stopped. As she refused to remain silent he began to listen, and enquired as to how that pain was related to the relationship, and gradually their distant but comfy relationship became real and full of passion and aliveness.

This new paradigm invites individuals, and couples, to become allies. He and She together are needed if we are going to bring spirit and matter together, and body to thought - accepting the change and

transformation that their union is going to bring about. The body does not speak in words, it communicates through feelings and sensations. As the earth is doing. As women we carry the womb, wherein lies our greatest capacity to feel, to be receptive - which is not something passive, but an active sensitivity and response to stimuli. We need to honour our knowing, and withstand all the voices of our conditioning and listen to the erotic presence in our uterus, in our wombs, in our hearts' longing, and bring back that which has been buried underground - so that we can walk hand in hand, and guide the actions of Man and Woman with the regained confidence and open hearts.

And perhaps, who knows, for first time in his-story, Logos and Eros can listen to each other, and make love with each other, rather than remaining forever apart and reducing themselves to having sex, and to mere togetherness. When the Great Masculine and the Great Feminine are lived through us we can enrich each other in ways that only live in our imagination, or as it was for me, through childhood on into my early, budding, pubescent years.

All changes are birthed from within us - all scientific discoveries, ideals, art, and revolutions. They are born out of the deep, dark within, and it is to that deep, dark foundation that we need to return - and as women we lead the way. When mind (Logos) and body (Eros) love each other again this love will generate fruit and will transform our reality, and we enable us to feel the divine, erotic presence of being alive on this glorious planet earth.