

Newsletter from Dr. Iyer
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Beyond what our mothers taught us
[An excerpt from a book I am writing]

Peggy Tabor Millin in her book, *Women, Writing, and Soul-Making*, asks: “Why is it that women disown their genius, have so much trouble claiming it, and can be swept off by the smallest current of criticism? Are we so born to pleasing others that we do not know who we are, cannot find that inner thread unless it is handed to us?”



There are many mythologies that separate us from ourselves. The myth(s) regarding women is one of the most insidious and pervasive. Almost all religions are patriarchal. It wasn't always this way, but it has been long enough to seem like “basic reality”. The rules of patriarchy and patriarchal religions automatically create a sense of “less-than” for women. Most of the rules in these religions are oppressive to women. For example, admonition to tone down a pervasive arrogant ego implies there IS a “dominating ego”. The issue for most women by and large has to do with egos so shattered they don't even know who they are outside of the roles they play in making others OK. Although this still speaks to the need for reducing the influence of a “negative ego”, the ego of which we speak for women is most often that inner voice of self-condemnation. It requires a different medicine. And going at it with the pickaxe of judgment does more harm to an already injured place inside of us.

Many women grew up under the influence of mothers who were steeped in the deepest brine of this matter. Barb told me that the hardest part about living with her mother was that “it was sad and depressing. Not much joy. I knew she was unhappy. I felt bad for her. I constantly felt that I wasn't good enough. I learned to keep things hidden, be quiet, to be embarrassed about who I was.” Lynette said, “It was hard to see my mother suffer. She dealt with so many issues: the loss of her mother, the infidelity of my father, the loss of my brother, her son. My father started drinking, and she couldn't cope any more. Even so, she never took it out on us and maintained a ‘smile through adversity’.”

On the other hand, ironically, sometimes the very love that our mothers provide to us leaves us feeling “less than” in ways that may be surprising to those who grew up without a sense of safe haven with their mothers. Lanelle describes her mother as “so much a mother, constantly helping and present – supporting. I felt taken care of. But – I also felt less than some times – she was so good at anything and I often felt like I was not doing enough. There was a detriment of her doing all for me. I didn't learn to persevere or figure things out so well.”

The cultural milieu and myths in which we grow up influence us in one way or another. Our mothers, of course, had this same paradigm in which to grow, survive and (amazingly) sometimes thrive. In many ways, the relationship we have with our mothers invokes the most basic Buddhist principle of learning to neither cling nor push away the reality in which we dwell. It is notable that within mother-daughter relationships, the syndrome of “never being enough” came about whether our mothers were too critical, or too helpful. This seems reasonable when our moms were constantly finding fault with us. But it is interesting that this syndrome can also arise within the context of our mothers being so good that we never feel we can compare favorably to her.

The cultural milieu in which we grew was the same, by and large, as that of our mothers. We were ALL taught – in one way or another – that as a woman we needed to earn love by being nice in the way women had to be. To placate, make OK for others. Spirituality in men’s terms has women as their helpmates. There is no mention of women in their own right under these doctrines. Our culture reflects the same more.

One ironic answer is to embrace. Use that which IS our inherent strength – for the good it can do us all. Embrace the mother we had – who did the best she could. And – most importantly, embrace ourselves – in the moment, doing the best WE can. Like in Tai Chi, we move WITH the energy of what we do best, but learn to include ourselves in the matrix of receiving as well as giving. The only way we can make the maxim, “it is in giving that we receive” really work is if we also really receive!

Learning to turn the spotlight of nourishment on our own parched souls may take some time of unlearning some of the most harsh rules we live by. But it is essential for our wellbeing.

Snippets of Information:

- Please join me for a Vision Quest! Some of you remember the days (a few decades ago, when our bodies were young and lithe) when I led Vision Quests for women out in the wilderness: Washington, Oregon, Canada. I delight in the fact that some of you remain in my circle of contact and close heart. When I was asked by OM Sanctuary to lead a Vision Quest in the beauty and --- comfort---- of their lovely grounds, I hesitated only a moment. I do believe what we swap out in the way of “wilderness wildness” will be adequately compensated for by doing the rituals and exercises. We’ll have lots of opportunity to do our inner work in solitude; lots of private places at the Sanctuary. And for those of you traveling a distance, staying at the OM Sanctuary Inn is a treat. Heck, it’s a destination point unto itself! Contact OM Sanctuary directly to sign up: Phone: 828-252-7313 Email: info@omsanctuary.org. I do hope to see you!
- You Tubes of talks: <https://www.youtube.com/user/DocMAWallace/>. Please pass on to anyone who may benefit from these. I’m providing these free of charge as a service, hoping to share the work I’ve already done. There are trailers here as well as full talks; and a couple excerpted meditations that folks might find useful.

Joy to you! ~ Mary Ann Iyer, MD

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