

Motherless Children

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We live in a patriarchal culture and have been immersed in the Father world since long before Copernicus and Descartes, dating back to our monotheistic, patriarchal gods – before Christ, before Mount Olympus. During the Iron Age, a shift took place away from the reverence for Mother Earth toward efforts to control nature. It has been argued that we needed to develop the masculine *logos* consciousness – a natural evolutionary stage to help us differentiate and discriminate. Nonetheless, Father's values have since overshadowed Mother's, resulting, to a degree, in generations of motherless children.

Who is Mother? She hails from the land of the unconscious – a place considered highly suspect by Father's solar consciousness. She holds the unknown potential in her womb and bears new life. She is the earthy, sensual, messy, emotional, relational, often chaotic element that has been devalued, demonized, neglected, and raped. More often than not, we know the feminine, including Mother, in her negative form – the jealous and conniving StepMother, the devouring, witchy Baba Yaga or the hysterical and histrionic Prima Donna.

What's the cost? What happens to the unmothered? Let's take a closer look at two motherless children to gain some insight into the damage that has been done by this imbalance.

I hope, as you read the following fairy tale, that you move out of a literal interpretation into an archetypal, symbolic one. Whether you are male or female, imagine that each one of these characters is a part of your own psyche. We are all in this together. Familiarize yourself with your own inner masculine and feminine, your own Father and Mother, etc. Is there a Son in you (your masculine side) that's ready to leave the limits of Father's house? Do you have a Princess (your feminine side) that has been more or less held captive? How about a diabolical Mountain Spirit (the internalized negative patriarch) who convinces your feminine side that union with "the other" is an option not even worth considering? How is Mother missing?

The Cursed Princess

Once upon a time there was a Father and Son. The Son was unhappy, so he asked for his inheritance and went out into the world.

He came upon a dead man who had had no money for his own burial. His body was left to be ravaged by scavenging animals. The Son, who had a caring heart, gave his inheritance to bury the man.

He then continued on his journey. After a while, a man joined him. Eventually, they reached a town that was in mourning because their Princess was bewitched. Most of the time she was sweet and quite detached, but she was prone to falling into a wicked temper. These outbursts occurred whenever a man expressed interest in her. She then would challenge him to answer her riddles. If he could not, he was condemned to death. She had already killed nine men. Unbeknownst to all, the force behind this behavior was an evil Mountain Spirit that had convinced the Princess to play strictly by his rules, cutting her off from any possibility of relationship.

The Son's Companion encouraged him to approach the Princess. The Companion confessed that he was actually *the spirit* of the man that the Son had buried and was there to help him. So the two teamed up to save the Princess.

The Spirit Companion outfitted the Son with wings and told him to accompany the Princess when she flew to the home of the despotic Mountain Spirit. The Son was instructed to beat her with a rod on the journey. The Son did as he was told, in spite of the deep pain it caused him to hurt the Princess.

When the Princess arrived, she explained to her master – the forbidding Mountain Spirit – that she had met another victim and was awaiting his instructions. The Mountain Spirit gave her the riddle, which the Son overheard. The next day, much to the surprise of the Princess, the Son answered the riddle.

The Princess had him return two more days for two more riddles, promising that he would be rewarded if he knew the answers. Each night, he flew with the Princess, beat her all the way, and learned the appropriate responses.

The last time the Son not only answered the riddle but also presented the Mountain Spirit's head to the Princess. The King rewarded the Son, as had been promised, and honored them in marriage.

There is more to the tale, but for the purpose of this article, I'll stop here. If you want to read a complete version of the "The Cursed Princess," see Verena Kast's interpretation in Witches, Ogres, and The Devil's Daughter (Boston: Shambhala Publica-

tions, 1992).

“The Cursed Princess” introduces us to two unmothered characters. Neither the mother of the Son nor of the Princess is as much as mentioned.

The underlying theme of the fairy tale is establishing freedom from the domain of a controlling Father. First, the dissatisfied Son walks away from his father’s world. Then, an enormous amount of energy is invested in the salvation of the Princess from a spirit father – the Mountain Spirit. Apparently, it is far easier to simply leave the home of the personal father, claiming the masculine values for oneself. The greater challenge is in unleashing the feminine principle from the grip of paternal expectations.

The Son leaves home because he is not happy. Father does not meet all of his needs. Developmentally, it’s appropriate for sons to leave, but it seems his departure is motivated by something more – an awareness that happiness could not be achieved simply in the father realm – a one-sided existence. Could the unmothered part of him be searching for some of the missing pieces?

The Son takes all that he has inherited from his father – all the Father values – and invests it in burying an impoverished man. He truly leaves his father behind with this gesture, relinquishing the old outdated father principle. The result of his benevolence is a new relationship with the masculine that we must assume is different from the limitations that he experienced with his own father. Also, keep in the back of your mind that the burial is a return to Mother Earth. Perhaps, Mother is not as absent as we first suspected. Perhaps the Spirit Companion brings a new *mothered* energy upon his return.

Psychologically, what might this look like? As children of the patriarchy, we have all been living in Father’s house – so this tale could easily be interpreted from the perspective of a man or woman who finally realize that they are tired of living with Father. The Tyrannical Father is fairly easy to spot. He’s the part of us who rules the roost, wants dominion over all, and mistrusts the emotional and relational because it interferes with his agenda. He wants to divide and conquer. When He claims a wife (attempts to engage with the feminine), She is expected to be at his beck and call, which makes conscious relationships an impossible venture. The *modus operandi* is either/or, as opposed to both/and. The feminine element eventually seems to be wiped out, or perhaps She goes underground.

How do you experience this kind of Father energy in your own life? Is there a sense of dissatisfaction that is connected to an internal despot who limits and controls? If so, can you imagine investing in a revised version of the masculine principle – one that surpasses this sterile rendition?

The objective is not to annihilate a relationship with the masculine or the father principle but to find a new consciousness, a greater consciousness, a deeper consciousness of Him. The Son discovers that possibility with the Spirit Companion.

Has a Spirit Companion already tried to join you on your journey? What outrageous schemes has he suggested? Have you been respectful and grateful like the Son or discounted him as a lunatic, because he challenges the status quo?

The second half of the tale is about a sweet, dear Princess who is possessed by a killing spirit. A ruthless autocrat bars her from living her life fully.

She has been caught between two lonely poles, that of being

- isolated in a saccharine existence
- isolated by a deadly, protective aggression.

What’s behind this split? She lives in her father’s house and under the thumb of the loathsome Mountain Spirit. It seems that when a man attempts to interfere with this *menage a trois*, the Princess reacts with a vengeance. There is no maternal influence in the household to provide a balance to the ultra-masculine world.

Imagine again, the child of the patriarchy with a feminine side that has been so imprisoned, so depressed, so overfathered and undermothered that when something new and redemptive is offered, She rejects it. Rather than accept a proposal for partnership, that wounded, mistrustful feminine aspect of either a man or woman lashes out, responding as She has been responded to. She has no faith in her own voice but looks to Father both to ask the questions and to provide the answers. To her credit, She does give that partnering side a chance. She seems to want something more. But ultimately She sabotages and destroys the relationship, because She does not trust that She could have anything more.

If She were able to trust one of her suitors, then She would have to betray her master, to leave the safety of the paternal realm, and allow herself to become vulnerable. The very thought sends her into a defensive rage, running to “Daddy” for the answers – the only “safe” harbor that She has ever known. Why should She trust these other bozos? She assures herself that Daddy Mountain Spirit has **ALL** the answers.

Consider the Princess as the feminine component of the patriarchal man or woman that we met earlier. Both the Son (the masculine aspect) and the Princess (the feminine aspect) have been overfathered, but the Son side has enough strength and vision to move on. The Princess’s resources, however, have been more depleted by the established regime. The feminine component has been reduced to a compliant, “Good Father’s Daughter” stance. How in the world *does* the Feminine survive in such a toxic environment? Why should She believe in something else in this unmothered world? There has been no modeling of the conscious feminine or the possibility of partnership between the Masculine and the Feminine. These options are highly suspect, even considered dangerous because they challenge the norm.

Are you aware of this Princess split in your own psyche – the choice being a more vulnerable, gentle tenderness versus

a vengeful, retaliatory mistrust? If so, look closer and you will see that there is no place in between that holds the emotion and contains it and believes in it and transforms it.

This *new* masculine energy, which is introduced by the Spirit Companion, extends a hand by believing in something bigger than the father world and by trusting that there is life behind the perverted, distorted, untended feminine side. Over the course of time, as the patriarchal world has overshadowed all others, the Feminine has become divided. She had best behave and shut up. But as we all know, that only lasts so long before She goes mad. She can not, will not be contained. Her energy eventually is expressed, but often destructively. It may take the form of a depression, addiction, illness or violent moodiness. But She will take shape in some form or another.

The challenge is to wrestle out of the Mountain Spirit's grip in order to claim the Princess in her fullness as well as to embrace the possibility of a partnered, side-by-side existence.

The Son, with the help of this new godfather-like consciousness, provides just that antidote. His aggression with the rods suggests his determination to fight back, to say "no," to weaken the patriarchal complex. At the same time that the Son tries to loosen the totalitarian stronghold, he believes in and moves towards the Princess's genuine potential. Most of us, when faced with the Madwoman within either ourselves or others, respond, instead, with flight or fight. Avoid or destroy. These tactics keep the complex entrenched in a self-perpetuating stalemate. The courageous Son, backed by the Spirit Companion, offers another approach: trust that there is more.

Go back to your own inner world. Is there an untamed, fear-based resistance and aggression in you that keeps you from life? That, at times, wants to destroy any gesture that offers hope? How can you constructively drain the life-force out of this daimonic mindset (utilizing the rods)? While at the same time, lovingly and determinedly remind the Imprisoned Feminine, time and time again, that there are alternatives to her captivity.

As children of the patriarchy, we have been handed a legacy. Do we pass on the familiar paradigm? Or do we envision and create something new?

In conclusion, let's switch gears

Quarterly News - Winter 2001

back to that which is so appallingly absent in this tale – the maternal. One of the invaluable roles that the Great Mother brings is the possibility that death leads to rebirth. She contains and transforms and offers the hope of new life. It seems to me that the Spirit Companion has been mothered (remember his return to earth), for he believes in the Son's desire for more than what he had in his father's world, and helps him succeed in a seemingly impossible situation. When the Princess is released from her patronage to the Mountain Spirit, the Feminine is redeemed, opening up the potential for the two to create a new ruling principle, a King and Queen in partnership, ultimately bringing greater consciousness to their role as parents.

We never directly meet Mother, but my guess is that, in spite of Father's prominence, She is at work behind the scenes, waiting for opportunities to inform each of us on the rest of the story. The question still remains, however, how might Mother have turned this tale upside down if She had been more visible from the beginning.

"The Cursed Princess" depicts a world without mother, and some of the struggles that result from such a quandary. Join me on January 20th for further reflections. Meanwhile keep an eye out for your own Spirit Companion, and more importantly for MOTHER!



photo – Helen Moore