

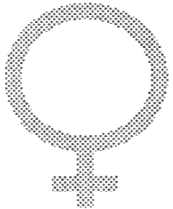
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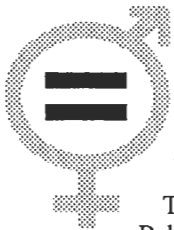
AN LDS FEMINIST QUARTERLY

March 1994

Spirituality and Gender



The following panel discussion, sponsored by the Southern California Chapter of the Mormon Women's Forum, was presented at the Sunstone Symposium West on March 12, 1994.



Introduction

by Lorie Winder Stromberg

To the chagrin of our regional Public Affairs Coordinator, my white ribbon and I walked into the Primary he was showing off to a reporter from *Buz* magazine. To his credit, he told the reporter what he thought the white ribbon symbolized and gave him my phone number when he asked to interview me about contemporary Mormonism on the Westside of Los Angeles. The reporter and I talked about some of the challenges facing Mormons and Mormonism in the 90s—issues such as maintaining some form of control over an institution experiencing phenomenal growth; the inevitable clash of tradition and modernity; and, of course, the burgeoning feminist movement in the church. He asked me one particularly compelling question, namely, would Mormonism be altered in a fundamental way if women achieved full integration, voice and equality within our religious community? Good question.

As our panelists approach the topic of "Spirituality and Gender," they consider this as well as the following questions:

- Is the Church as an institution an adequate vehicle for male and female spirituality? How does its present patriarchal structure affect its ability to serve all of its members? Is it possible, appropriate or even desirable to envision or lobby for a Mormonism without its traditional, patriarchal structure? Or, is patriarchy so much a part of Mormonism that it can never be escaped or superseded?
- More fundamentally, is there an essential "Masculine" with a capital "M" or "Feminine" with a capital "F"? How can we ever know? Are such distinctions important?
- Is there any essential difference between male and female, masculine and feminine spirituality? Or, do identifiable differences, if any, arise out of culturally-conditioned experiences?
- Even if we redefine or clarify terms like masculine and feminine such that they are not necessarily tied to the biological male and female, is there so much cultural baggage attached to the these terms that they are unable to escape traditional gender stereotyping? Have such terms become so tainted by heretofore accepted patriarchal definitions that they no longer are useful and must be discarded?

Gender and Spirituality in the Post-Industrial LDS Family

by Mike Austin

I would like to begin with two quotations that, together, say a great deal about the way that our society has constructed both gender and spirituality in the 20th century. The first comes from Imamu Amari Baraka, a liberal black playwright and radical Muslim separatist, in his article "Black Women":

Those were the days, alright. A man was a man, and a woman was a woman, and each of them knew what that meant. Father was the head of the family in the real sense of the term. Mother respected him for it and received all the gratifications she needed or wanted at home, doing her well-defined jobs.... Man was strong, woman was feminine—and there was little loose talk about phony equality.¹

The second observation comes from Helen B. Andelin, conservative white author and Mormon housewife, in her book *Fascinating Womanhood*, still in print after more than thirty years:

What is the Role of Man? It is to be the guide, protector and provider for his wife and children. This role is not merely a result of custom or tradition, but is of divine origin. It was God who placed the man at the head of the family and commanded him to earn the bread. Women were given a different assignment—that of wife, mother, and homemaker. Marriage is a partnership, but it is not an equal partnership.²

It would be difficult to imagine a pair of bedfellows stranger than Imamu Amari Baraka and Helen B. Andelin. The former, a well-known black nationalist, wrote "Black Women" as part of a call for revolution and separation; the latter, an obscure homemaker from Southern California, wrote *Fascinating Womanhood* as an etiquette manual for single women in search of the perfect mate and married women trying to keep him. The two authors represent polar opposite positions on a number of important binaries—black-white, radical-conservative, working class-leisure class, Easterner-Westerner, Muslim-Christian, male-female—yet the only significant area in which their subject matters intersect produces complete and unqualified agreement. The structure, arrangement, and logic of these two passages are completely interchangeable, and both rely on four basic assumptions about the spirituality of gender: 1) That men and women are separated by barriers that transcend culture or socialization; 2) That a man's spirituality is defined by the professional sphere; 3) That a woman's spirituality is defined by the domestic sphere; 4) That this relationship is inherently unequal.

These attitudes are not specifically Muslim or Mormon; they have been more or less universal over the past hundred years and continue to condition our society's perceptions today. I am not here to evaluate or pass judgement upon them; I do not wish to



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propose, as some are inclined to do, that any family relationship they produce is inherently evil, sexist, and oppressive. Millions of men and women of all denominations have created happy, stable, fulfilling families around these principles—one of which I grew up in—and it is not in my nature to devalue or cast aspersions on the experiences of anybody who has found happiness or fulfillment in any relationship.

What I do wish to suggest, however, is that the above propositions grow out of, and are constrained by, a specific set of historical and economic circumstances. The "home - work" dichotomy as we know it is a product of the Industrial Revolution. In the early part of the 19th century—when most people lived and worked in the same space— notions of family, gender, and spiritual roles were decidedly different than they are today. For example, in the 19th century it was fairly common for the Church to call a married man on a mission for two or three years, leaving his wife (or wives) to manage the family farm or business and provide for the children. Such a thing would never even be considered by the Missionary Department today, when a woman's spirituality is defined by her success "in the home." But in a society that recognized no meaningful distinction between "home" and "work," the statement "a woman's place is in the home" made very little sense.

As the infrastructure of society shifted from an agrarian to an industrial economic base, the physical distinction between the domestic and the professional spheres emerged as a rigid dividing line in our culture. Men took care of the job, women took care of the children, and that was that. Sometimes the system didn't work, but most of the time it did, and because it seemed like the best thing going, we began to construct definitions of spirituality around this dichotomy: men were considered spiritually successful if they were good providers and wage earners, and women were considered spiritual if they were capable wives, mothers, and homemakers. People who didn't quite fit the model—because they weren't married, because they didn't have children, or, heaven forbid, because they weren't married and did have children—were given love and support, but were not considered spiritually whole until they got with the program.

As I said before, I do not intend to criticize either the social or the spiritual aspects of this system. It had a lot of problems, but it worked. It put chickens in most everybody's pot and cars in most everybody's garage—and it provided millions of people with meaningful guidelines for constructing their spiritual, religious, and ethical selves. However, most people will agree that, for the last 30 years or so, the system hasn't been working very well. Various commentators have placed the blame for the breakdown of

"family values" on the failure of some large section of our culture to observe their prescribed spiritual duties: society is going to hell, we say, because women are working outside of the home, because men aren't willing to support their families any more, because adults are watching adult movies, because kids are watching too much TV, or simply because we are a part of the most wicked generation ever to inhabit the earth.

Bunk!

Family values are breaking down because the infrastructural realities that they were created to support have shifted underneath our feet and caught us by surprise. We are no longer living in an industrial age, or an economy in which the primary commodities are goods and services. We are rapidly becoming an information age, or an economy in which the primary economy is information and the most important jobs are those which facilitate the creation, storage, retrieval, organization, or application of knowledge. The social implications of this change are immense and well beyond the scope of my presentation. However, I would like to list and briefly comment on two well-documented economic trends that, in my opinion, have been quietly shaping our lives for the past 30 years and will continue to do so well into the future:

1) One-income families are becoming increasingly rare. Most women, Mormon or otherwise, will never have the choice of whether or not to enter the workplace at some time in their lives. This is not a matter of ski boats and late-model cars. Our entire economy is constructing itself around a two-income model, and wages and prices will continue to reflect this assumption far into the future.

2) Opportunities for both men and women to work inside of the home are becoming increasingly frequent. Knowledge is a commodity that can be created anywhere. And with word processors, faxes, modems, e-mail, voice mail, cellular phones, and all of the coming features of the information super highway, "work" will no longer necessarily be the antithesis of "home."

Taken together, these two phenomena suggest that the Industrial Revolution distinction between home and work—a dichotomy that has conditioned our society's assumptions about gender for more than a hundred years—is collapsing from both ends. We can no longer think in terms of a female domestic sphere and a male professional sphere, since women currently make up as large a percentage of the work force as men do. Nor can we look at home and work as opposite ends of a single dichotomy, since both men and women are conducting more and more of their business activities from their own homes. All of this means that, as both a Church and a culture, Mormons will have to rethink the way that we

define spirituality within the family unit. When we no longer have access to the home-work dichotomy as we presently know it, then we can no longer separate male and female roles into the traditional “provider” and “homemaker” roles.

This does not mean, I want to emphasize, that either providing or homemaking will become less important to the success of the family unit. Nor does it mean that providing for a family and caring for children should no longer be considered part of one’s spiritual duties. As a Mormon, I believe that families are forever, that raising good children is the most important thing we can accomplish in this world, that no other success can compensate for failure in the home. However, the social conditions of our time make it increasingly difficult to parcel domestic duties in gender-specific packages. Nor do I believe that such segregation is necessary or desirable. I do not believe that “a woman’s place is in the home” is an eternal principle; however, I do believe that it is based on one: that a parent’s place is with his or her children.

As an official body, the Church has recently made important strides towards recognizing the implications that I speak of. As a cultural body, however, Mormons still have a long way to go. To our own peril, we are still clinging to definitions of spirituality that reflect a world we no longer inhabit. In such a world, a woman is certainly allowed to work outside the home if she has to—as long as she has a low-paying, low-prestige job and hates every minute of it. But if she has a rewarding career or a job she loves, she must be spiritually inferior. Similarly in this world, a man is welcome to play with his children for a few minutes after work, or take them fishing on Saturdays, but if he works only a part-time job, or spends an inordinate amount of time at home, or allows his wife to get a job when he is “completely capable” of working longer hours himself, we question his commitment to the Gospel.

This simply won’t do. In the future, families will find that domestic and professional duties can be divided up along a number of non-traditional lines. What we must do as a Church, I believe, is make sure that every family can make these decisions without having their spirituality called into question. This means that we have to define “spirituality,” for both men and women, in a way that emphasizes options: options for men and women to pursue completely traditional roles if they chose, options that allow women to be spiritual in the workplace, options that allow men to be spiritual in the kitchen, and options that allow for more Church participation on the part of singles, single-parent families, and anybody else who doesn’t fit nicely into the provider-homemaker dichotomy. Such a reconception of spiritual gender roles will be an integral part of our ability to minister to our children’s generation and continue Mormonism’s well-known emphasis on strong families far into the future.

Notes

1. Quoted in bel hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press, 1988, p. 96.

2. Helen Andelin, *Fascinating Womanhood*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1963, p. 119.

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Re-visioning Women and Men in a “Feminine” Spiritual Context

by Kathryn Turley Sonne

Freedom from the co-dependency of opposition is a necessary component in my personal re-visioning of spirituality. I believe that the binary construct of “roles” is an obstacle that distracts us. This polarization of men and women prevents us both from maximizing our spiritual power in an interconnected manner. Power for men is equated with priesthood and power for women is equated with motherhood in the long-standing traditional answer for separ-

ate but equal. However, separate but equal has failed in racial, handicapped, and gender segregation. Expecting spiritual segregation to be healthy, productive, and fulfilling is a set-up for failure and dissension. Virginia Woolf states in *A Room of One’s Own*,

[I]n each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man’s brain, the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman’s brain, the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. . . . It is when this fusion takes place that a mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. . . . [T]hat the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided.¹

Woolf still holds with some binary traits between men and women, but encourages a cooperation between the two different selves. Literary critic Elaine Showalter’s theory of “feminine” liberation serves as a bridge in my concept of a spiritual “self” in the gospel. Some contemporary French feminists/modernists have gone a step beyond Woolf and expanded on Showalter’s theories, in their endorsement of, and valuation of a “feminine” mind. Theirs is a study of linguistic processes rather than biological differentiation. Destruction of the linguistic binary obstacles allows for an unhindered, androgynous, semiotic process in which an intellectual, and creative spirituality is born. A “feminine” signified mind (which can be biologically male or female) is spherical (bisexual and androgynous), and multi-functional as opposed to hierarchal, linear, and power based. In order to survive in a church where role defining and hierarchy is implicit in its daily functioning I must place it in the context of its culture, and I must have a personal re-vision of a “feminine” spirituality.

In the text *Women’s Voices* we can get a glimmer of what early Mormon women’s spheres of activity included:

[T]he writings of Latter-day Saint women indicate that the women lived much of their lives in a subculture separate from men. It was a culture whose chief occupations were nurturing and housekeeping and whose primary rituals centered around women’s relationships with other women, children, and men. Nurturing was often extended beyond home into schoolteaching, nursing, and midwifery; and there was also a ready market outside the home for such home-making skills as weaving, sewing and tailoring, cooking, and cleaning. The visiting that consistently strengthened bonds among women had its public counterpart in the gathering of women in Relief Societies, Mutual Improvement Associations, and, at the end of the century, women’s clubs. These female occupations and rituals form the basis of a cultural history long untold. . . .²

As women in the early church had increased awareness of the 19th century women’s movement they energetically expanded their spheres with increased education and entrepreneurial ventures in unusual fields. The *L.A. Times* recently featured an article discussing the feminization of California’s economy. The article indicated that contemporary women continue to excel in non-traditional businesses, and as creative voices in traditionally male roles. For example, women police officers have been overwhelmingly successful in moderating tense domestic and criminal situations as well.

The common thread which seems to appear in all of these situations (domestic to professional) is relationship based. Inter-relating and connecting in a spherical model rather than a hierarchal model bodes cooperation and equal empowerment of all contributors. “Lighthearted or soul searching, sharing among women was serious business. It was one means whereby they reaffirmed the reality and significance of their female culture.”³ Inspiring spiritual gatherings

characterized many early female saints' experiences. Healing the sick, speaking in tongues and prophesying were occasions of "joy and rejoicing."⁴ Mary Fielding Smith wrote in a letter to her sister, "some of the Sisters while engaged in conversing in tongues their countenances beaming with joy, clasped each others hands & kissd in the most affectinate manner."⁵ As sisters in the gospel and in our communities we must continue to emphasize our sharing, and consider it serious business.

The study of women in my history and the early women in the church has also been aided by the feminist theory posited by Elaine Showalter in her text *A Literature of Their Own*. The theory has three stages which have been helpful in my examination of the past and contemporary women in my history, and the gospel.

First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity.⁶

I believe these phases to be cyclical—meaning that after the third phase is completed that full liberation is not guaranteed permanence. Permanence would be contrary to a spherical model of movement. I also believe that these phases can concurrently be played out—impacting others and serving as catalysts for phase shifts. The level of spirituality of many 19th century women in the gospel is characteristic of Showalter's third phase of development. These women turned inward and utilized their innate spiritual gifts in an empowering, connected, communal manner. But, organized, hierarchal power structures are threatened by such powerful sharing. Thus, auxilarizing of the Relief Society, and the withdrawing of "approval" of shared spirituality initiated a shift to the first phase. The controlled manipulation of faith returned the spiritual power to the patriarchy. So, as a result women were forced to "imitate" and "internalize" their desires for increased spirituality into the constraints of their roles.

The second phase identified as "protest" and "advocacy" is clearly in progres as we speak, and has appeared sporadically in the past. This is the critical stage where silencing is most frequently achieved, where cultural, and administrative power is flexed, where resignation of exhausted participants is achieved. In order to move on to the third phase of "self-discovery" we must either give up the battle in exchange for peace, or we must be capable of resignifying the battle as a means of survival and spiritual empowerment.

Contemporary French feminists have provided me with some necessary tools of survival in a hierarchally dependent church stuck in Showalter's phase one and two. Helene Cixous warns women of falling into the trap of seeking patriarchal constructed power. In so doing, women are falling into Showalter's first phase of imitation—they are attempting to be men and condoning their constructs. In the patriarchal binary thought process it is a "general battlefield where the struggle for signifying supremacy is forever re-enacted."⁷ In order for one term or one gender to acquire meaning, the other term must be destroyed or devalued. Women are forever in the passive roles of binary opposites. Cixous advocates a realm where binary structures do not connote power—where a freeplay of signifiers promotes meaning through connectedness rather than superiority. Cixous also espouses a bisexual writing that revels in open-ended textuality. Thus, a spherical model rather than a model with a beginning and an end.

Another French feminist, Luce Irigaray, claims that historically the only time women have spoken outside the realm of patriarchal language is in the context of mysticism.

"[T]he mystical experience is precisely an experience of the loss of subjecthood, of the disappearance of the subject/

object opposition, it would seem to hold a particular appeal for women, whose very subjectivity is anyway being denied and repressed by patriarchal discourse. Though not all mystics were women, mysticism nevertheless seems to have formed the one area of high spiritual endeavor under patriarchy where women could and did excel more frequently than men. Touched by the flames of the divine, the mystic's soul is transformed into a fluid stream dissolving all difference. This orgasmic experience eludes the specular rationality of patriarchal logic...."⁸

Mysticism or, as Webster defines it, "the belief in direct or intuitive attainment of communion with God or of spiritual beliefs" has resurfaced throughout women's history. It is reminiscent of Anne Hutchinson's experience in an early patriarchal puritan community. She preached a doctrine of salvation realized through the intuition of God's indwelling grace. Her ideas eliminated the need for institutionalized hierarchy as an intermediary from the individual to God. Her mystical beliefs and spiritual power were considered a threat to the authority of the Massachusetts clergy and banishment was ordered. The experiences of early LDS women in a Victorian-based community also parallel the continuing penalties for practicing mysticism. Women's direct access to the spiritual powers of healing, blessing, speaking in tongues, and prophesying were considered a threat to the binary construct of men as spiritual guides to women. Therefore they were removed from women's grasp. The trend continues in modern times. Rather than allow women the opportunity to participate in blessing circles, ambiguous "rules" are changed so that spiritual elimination of women is explicit, and communal sharing and recording of spiritual abuse is feared and being excised from our communities.

Additionally, Irigaray claims that women can escape patriarchal structures when they gather together and participate in *Womanspeak*. *Womanspeak* is a women's language which "emerges spontaneously when women speak together...."⁹ Thus we see the appeal of women's groups such as Mormon Women's Forum. But, any women's group must be separate from patriarchal authority in order to function apart from male signifiers. Thus we see why contemporary Relief Society is unable to facilitate a freeplay of signifiers, while early Relief Society (pre-auxiliaration) was conducive to mystical freedom and spiritual dynamicism.

Julia Kristeva, another French philosopher, argues very specifically that linguistics must be studied from a semiotic perspective in order to understand and change the pre-oedipal development choices of language. The initial semiotic period of language development comes in the pre-oedipal stage when a child perceives no separation between itself and the world. Binary definitions are not yet a conditioned response. As a child moves from the semiotic stage to the symbolic stage, there is an acceptance of the phallus as the representation of the Law. In order to re-access the semiotic all phallic language structures must be questioned and not regarded as absolute truth. Our current spiritual language does not allow for a free-play of signifiers. Thus, women continually play a passive role to the binary superiority of "priesthood" language.

In order to have a spiritually fulfilling experience in a male-constructed church we must rely on ourselves to re-signify our experience in a language and context where we can have a dynamic spiritual encounter with God. Can we re-signify our experience and still fully participate in the gospel? I believe that re-signifying spirituality for women and men concerned with inequities is an option for survival within current structures. I would also like to emphasize that both men and women can participate in this re-signification. The term "feminine" in this context connotes a process not a biological identity. Re-visioning and re-signifying the patriarchal constructs that we trust to provide us with a spiritual experience and valuing our own intuition will free us from our co-dependency on binary answers to a spherical gospel model. So that ultimately, we can engage in a spiritual experience that is as Woolf suggested

possible: "... resonant and porous... transmit[ting] emotion without impediment; that is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided."¹⁰

Notes

1. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981, p. 98.
2. Kenneth Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey and Jill Mulvey Derr, *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1991, p. 9-10.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
6. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 13.
7. Quoted in Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge, 1985, p. 105.
8. Quoted in Moi, p. 136.
9. Quoted in Moi, p. 144.
10. Woolf, p. 98.

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Feminine Spirituality: A Mode of Being

by Barbara Bishop

The original chorus of the children's song, "I am a Child of God" read, "Lead me, guide me, walk beside me, help me find the way, teach me all that I must know, to live with him someday." The words were changed sometime in the 1970s to "Teach me all that I must do." It strikes me that doing focuses on external activities that can be seen, measured, and assessed. It is a manner we are well-acquainted with in our church. Knowing, on the other hand, hints at what I would call a being mode, and that for me, is feminine and less well-known.

A being mode is receptive, not passive. It expands consciousness and encourages the development of the imagination and virtually all creative endeavors. It accepts the instinctual rather than the purely rational and reasonable. In a being mode the individual turns inward for answers rather than to external authorities. In seeking to describe feminine spirituality, I want to make clear that I do not ascribe this to women only. Men as well as women have the capacity to look inside and develop an internalized, wholly subjective spiritual life which leads towards wholeness and includes direct experiences with God.

I access a being mode primarily through meditation, dream recall and interpretation. Indeed, a being mode is the goal of meditation, tai chi and yoga, which teach people to listen to their bodies and through their bodies to the Divine. It develops openness, independence, self-trust and love. It is the primary attitude in receiving answers to prayers.

Just before Christmas three years ago I was trying to decide whether or not we should go to Utah for Christmas. In the middle of the night I sat rocking my then two-year-old son who was sick and feverish. Our car wasn't working very well and I wondered if it would even make it if we started out. In addition, big snowstorms throughout Utah made road conditions hazardous. My brother had called me that day from Utah and encouraged me not to come. I was apprehensive for a number of reasons. But my mother and father very much wanted us to be there for a family gathering. As I sat rocking Andrew, "pondering these things in my heart," a single line from a Christmas song popped into my head: "To face unafraid the plans that we've made." We drove to and from Utah without incident. Who popped that phrase into my head? How did it happen? I cannot explain the mystical, but I dare not deny its presence in my life either. Answers appear in such a subtle, quiet fashion I sometimes question whether or not I have had an experience or just a train of thought. Meditation often begins as a jumble of chaotic thoughts about what to fix for dinner, but moves eventually to body awareness, self-awareness and a spiritual reality.

In a being mode we come to understand many events in our waking lives as symbolic and purposeful rather than random and meaningless. Often events involving great suffering are designed to

guide us to new levels of understanding, self-knowledge and compassion. Sometimes dreams tell us a meaning we are too obtuse or stubborn to comprehend. When my youngest son was two months old, I carried him out of church in his baby seat. I opened our minivan, set him on the edge next to the seat and held him there with my knee as I put my older son in his car seat. I was pressing hard enough with my knee against the carrier that it flipped out of the car and he landed on his head. That night I replayed the entire scene in my dream. At the end of the dream I heard a voice of thunder say, "When you press too hard, it hurts their heads." I have thought about that dream many times as I have tried to become more conscious of my control issues and my communication patterns with my children. I call such dreams two-by-four therapy. It wasn't just my son who got hit over the head.

Feminine spirituality entails a groundedness in the body. It accepts and enjoys sexuality and sensuality. It includes laughter, playfulness and joy. In the unfolding of feminine spirituality a person learns to listen to and trust body messages. In its positive form feminine energy is healing, life-affirming and flowing. It affirms the body, whatever its size, its supposed flaws and distinct features. The process of moving towards a body center may involve caring for a garden, doing yoga, having a dog or a cat, taking a daily walk, hiking or other forms of outdoor exercise. Some of my most spiritual experiences have occurred while climbing Timpanogos with siblings and friends. Hiking that mountain centers me in my body as I partake of the sensory feast around me.

Sometimes spiritual growth comes from illnesses that refocus our attention on the body. When we concentrate on Mater, or Mother Earth, we can often discover some important symbolism regarding our dis-eased body and meaning in that dysfunction. This is true for mental illnesses as well.

Feminine spirituality asserts the importance of timing— different times of the day, different times of the month and different times in life. Sometimes when we aren't paying quite enough attention to our dissatisfaction with an unfulfilling job or being stuck in other ways, we'll have a nightmare in which someone frightening chases us. Night demons get our attention. They wake us up to the notion that we have insides and almost force us to listen. Carl Jung writes, "where danger is, there is salvation also."¹ An increase of shadow energy in our dreams can propel us forward towards spiritual transformation when it is acknowledged and redeemed.

You may recall the story of Jacob, who wrestled with the angel and came away with a dislocated hip.² "In those fortunate days," writes Carl Jung, "Jacob's story was believed without question. A contemporary Jacob, telling such a tale, would be treated to meaningful smiles." It takes courage to cultivate and trust intuitive understanding that makes no sense in a "world which has sold its soul for a mass of disconnected facts."³ It is risky. The mysterious realm of dreams, visions and revelations poses more questions than answers. Why are some saved by following an impulse or heeding a dream while others are not? It seems almost as if questions are posed to us which we have the opportunity to answer, if we are listening.

If we are listening, I have a sense that we haven't been trained how to listen. I know I wasn't. When Jung visited the Pueblo Indian Chief in New Mexico, the Chief said, "I don't understand white man. They are always seeking something. They are always uneasy and restless. We think they are mad... they think with their heads." When Jung asked him, "What do you think with?" the chief pointed to his heart.⁴

Increasingly, feminine spirituality includes experiences with the Divine Feminine. In *The Feminine Face of God*, Sherry Anderson recounts a powerful dream about the Goddess that led her to an exploration of feminine spirituality and eventually to the writing of her book. There are numerous other accounts now in print of people's experiences with the Goddess. The development over the centuries of a divine triad, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, is

incomplete. It needs the feminine principle to complete the divine quadrant, or mandala. Sometimes the Divine Feminine appears in dreams as Sophia, the black Madonna, a medicine woman or other wise healer.⁵ We have the opportunity to meet the Goddess and integrate goddess energy into our psyches if we pay heed to our dreams. Jung notes that men and women are “indispensable for the completion of creation.”⁶ The revelation of the Goddess requires our aid to bring her to consciousness. Carol Lynn Pearson’s play, *Mother Wove the Morning*, offers us one such revelation. I hope more will come.

Spirituality for me includes both masculine and feminine modes. Both are necessary. If creativity is feminine, the drive that gets me into my study and compels me to put fingers to the keyboard and write is a masculine energy. Without masculine energy, all my ideas would remain inside. The masculine sends it out into the world. The process towards consciousness and wholeness balances masculine and feminine energies. Our Western culture leans towards the masculine side so far that the masculine has been distorted into patriarchy, and the feminine has been largely ignored and forgotten. That is changing. This change has unexpected rewards. When we detach ourselves from traditional ideology, expectations and even accepted “truths,” we open ourselves up to the mystery of the Divine. That in turn deepens our understanding and reconnects us with previously denied aspects of ourselves. We are given the opportunity to relate to others on a more profound, spiritual level. Through this transformation process we eventually come to see a pattern, or river running through our lives. This eternal water nourishes and sustains us in times of darkness. We come to an appreciation for the great mystery of God, of Being and of life.

Notes

1. Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. New York: Vintage Books, 1961, p. 245.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 344.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
5. See Marion Woodman, *The Pregnant Virgin: Psychological Transformation*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1985 and *The Ravaged Bridegroom*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1990.
6. Jung, p. 256.

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Gender and Spirituality, or Why the Guerrilla is the Most Feminine Creature in the Spiritual Jungle

by Joanna Brooks

I suppose I’d better start by defining terms. The “feminine” and “spirituality.” Books, lives, and careers are devoted to debating what exactly the “feminine” is. Well, I think that’s one of the most tedious exercises ever invented. A metaphysical hamster treadmill that the philosophical fathers invented to keep us from our real purpose here—here in feminism and here on earth in general—saving each others’ lives.

What is the feminine? I don’t know. Does being a female make you feminine? And what does being a female mean? Does having a vagina make you female? Or does wearing pink and playing with Barbies make you a female? Are vaginas inherently feminine? Are Barbies?

Mormon epistemology would tell us that what we know comes from personal experience, confirmed by the Spirit. Do any of us have any kind of perspective on our personal experiences that would allow us to examine strand by strand the nature of our being, to hold each thread up to the light and organize a taxonomy of being—this makes me feminine, this makes me a woman? The fact is, no. As with deep Freudian type couchwork, most of this deconstruction of the person proves—I believe—fruitless. Most of us have no option but to take our person as it we know it and to do the

best we can. Most of us are just trying to get through the day.

So what is the “feminine”—I suggest that the “feminine” is a positionality. It’s a position sometimes assigned and sometimes assumed and sometimes defined by old white men for us and sometimes taken back and defined by ourselves. Can men occupy a feminine position? Yes. Can women? Yes. Can men occupy a masculine position? Yes. Can women? Yes. All of us are all masculine and feminine and little of it has anything to do with those external marks and signifiers—genitalia.

Godhood is a complete and balanced interdependence of feminine and masculine powers and natures. There are no gender roles in the celestial kingdom because godhood by definition requires a oneness, a complete intermingling and interdependency of power and person. I seriously doubt that Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father are the perfect stay-at-home, milk churning mother and the perfect pinstripe-wearing, authoritative father. And thank heavens. I won’t go to heaven if I know I have to make resin grapes there. We know that we are as they once were, and that as they are we may become. Certainly none of us is perfectly masculine or feminine. We’re all a little of both. And we’re all a little crazy. When we strive for union with our eternal companion, when we learn to support and sustain each other, we are learning to comply with universal physical laws which demand a balance in forces.

The rigor with which the external signifier of our male or female-bodies is correlated to a certain set of behaviors varies with the time and the age—even within our own Mormon culture. The life-saving work of scholars like Michael Quinn and Maxine Hanks showed us how the external sign of the female body has signified different roles and assignments in this culture. A female body signified something quite different in the days of Joseph Smith when women laid on hands, held keys, and healed than it did in the days of Spencer Kimball when women were officially proscribed from giving the prayer in sacrament meeting. In the end, what “female” means, what “feminine” means depends on who is doing the defining.

There is no “feminine” spirituality. There is no “masculine” spirituality. There is just spirituality. There is Joanna’s spirituality and Mike’s spirituality and my mom’s spirituality and Boyd K. Packer’s spirituality and Sonia Johnson’s spirituality.

Occasionally, because this is a celestial, fallen world and certain laws of physics prevent us from the celestial, speed-of-light type of union that exaltation promises us, we must symbolically and ritually approximate that higher state in the fallen language we have. Hence, in our church rituals people are as much symbolic as any of the other signs.

And let us remember and state again and again that people choose to stand in these parts for the good of the ritual. Certainly those brethren who were asked and agreed to play Lucifer in temples around the world were not expected to be Lucifer every day, and they weren’t treated badly at ward parties. Their highly defined role was part of a highly symbolic ritual that had its proper context within a certain setting. Men in sacrament meeting stand in to pass the sacrament as part of a highly ritualized, highly symbolic context. Women in the temple stand in as a symbol of the feminine principle of power. (As a side note—why is it that the woman is still veiled in the temple? Because certain people aren’t paying attention yet. Doesn’t the Book of Mormon show us that with great enough faith, we cannot be kept outside the veil. Certainly the veil signifies more about our collective spiritual maturity as a people than it does about the person wearing it.)

The few rituals of our religion are highly refined, highly specialized symbolic contexts. Day to day life is another context entirely. And just as we as individuals choose to play the symbolic parts rituals ask us to, we can choose how to play our parts during the hours and days that make up the vast majority of our lives. How much of our lives as Mormons is lived within the temple? Not much. Most of our Mormonism functions on the block, at the dinner

table, at school, in front of the television, hosing down the driveway. Unfortunately, as many times as we are told that what goes on in the temple is specific to that holy context, we are stupid and we extrapolate it to everyday things like who has to make dinner or change diapers and who chooses who says the opening prayer. And it really makes things so difficult and ridiculous.

"You first." "No, you first." "No, you first." "I think the handbook says that the third cousin of the head man in charge is responsible for passing out the sacrament meeting programs." "I believe that the washing of casserole dishes after the ward dinner is appropriately accomplished by those who are verily the producers of all life and flesh, the women."

And while we're so busy deciding who is proper for what role, based on our limited understanding of what gender signifies, the work does not get done. It just boggles the mind how much time gets wasted. There is so much work to be done, so much good news to spread. And we spend so much time in rhetoric and self-defensive political maneuvering which really has very little to do with saving lives.

Another highly symbolic ritual context which has been grossly over-interpreted to signify everything for the rest of our lives, in a dangerous case of biological determinism, is the physical process of parenthood. Long-standing cultural assumptions articulated by Sigmund Freud tell us that all production results from desire, which results from lack. Thus, woman makes babies because she desires power. Right? And thus, to protect himself, to build something, anything to keep woman, that "black widow spider" as Hartman Rector called her, away, man must build empires, make buildings, make the body and forms of the government, the church.

Let's think realistically about this. Honestly, childbearing had very little to do with desire until just a few years ago when birth control became available. More often, it has been just coincidence—good or bad—but magical nonetheless. We know that God assigned Eve to be the childbearer and Adam to be the groundtiller after the fall, and that the roles are—again—fallen, teletial approximations of a higher order.

We are eternal beings learning to master teletial conditions so that we can move onto celestial glories. This—all this—is temporary, all this over-emphasis and assumptions and assignment made based on gender are completely extraneous to and most often quite deleterious to our development as celestial persons.

The "mothers in Israel" are just people who had babies who are trying to work out their salvation. The leaders of the church are not our "fathers." They are our brethren.—Brethren who, like us, are just people trying to work out their salvation.

Now, as a young Mormon feminist who has been privileged to learn from many of my older feminist sisters, I have noticed a very interesting difference between the younger generation and the older. A lot of older Mormon feminists seem to feel a nostalgia for the time when their Church "fathers" were friendly to them. They feel some need to be reclaimed by the Church fathers, to be heirs to the structure of the fathers. They want someone over the pulpit to tell them they're okay. They want to be invited to meetings. Truly this has colored the nature of Mormon feminist activism, especially over the last year. White roses, ribbons, conferences—our efforts seem uniformly directed at the Church Office Building, to them up there signifying what we should be, and us standing on the street below, outside the big white building, wildly signifying back—"We're important too!" "Listen to us!" we say to them.

It seems strange that so much of our feminist activism is directed at convincing old, set-in-their-ways Utah white men, rather than at our sisters around the world. For a world wide church, why is so much of our feminist focus on one square block in Salt Lake City?

Younger feminists feel no such nostalgia. I could not care less about meetings and being recognized. Meetings have no relationship to my spirituality. Why is this? I have no nostalgia for a gentler time. I was baptized in the year of ERA, six weeks before Sonia

Johnson was excommunicated. Did I know who Sonia Johnson was when I got baptized? You bet I did. Did I know about black males and the priesthood? You bet I did. I have always seen the church as an organization in flux, the authorities as my brothers, not as my father. Can I argue with my brothers and still love them? You bet I can. Struggle has always been a part of it. I have never been a part of their feel-good empire in which if you play that role and I play this role all will be fine. It has never been fine. It has been a struggle every day of it, a struggle for which I am deeply grateful, a struggle which has absolutely brought me to my knees before my Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother.

And who has saved my life in this struggle, time and time again?—my sisters, and a few brothers too. Dear friends, people with whom I have a sustained relationship. Conference comes and goes and the great meetings go on behind their great closed doors, and I am never a part of it, and I don't care. Boyd K. Packer speaks twice a year and I speak to my sister on the phone every day. Who has a greater impact on my spirituality? Where is the real work done? Not in meetings. Not in one square block in Salt Lake on two holy Sundays a year. It is every day. It is everywhere.

Do you see the power in this? As women, we have no formal requirements, no silly twice-weekly correlation councils, no bulky big folders to carry around. All that baggage. All we need is the spirit and a conviction of our own authority, as women, in our own spiritual development and in the spiritual development of those with whom we have personal relationships. Lateral networks, far branching, infinite networks of brothers and sisters.

Have you heard of the guerrilla girls in New York City who by dark of night plaster the town with pro-woman posters? I have an idea. While the men are at their silly meetings, let's be spiritual guerrilla girls. How about we go visit the sick and clean up the environment and read good books and minister to each other and laugh and sing and bear testimony. Who needs top-down hierarchy? It is completely irrelevant to 99% of the work to be done here.

But in order to do this, we have to convert ourselves first. That's the trick. Because in this teletial state, in this epoch, God told man to do the naming. But let us not forget the primacy of our bond with God our Mother, our Father. And Adam's ability to name depends on our acceptance of that name. If we, in consultation with God, decide the name doesn't work, let us consult with our brothers about it. And if they keep calling it, let us cease to answer and keep on with our work. Let us, women, recognize our spiritual authority. We are certainly authorities in our own spiritual development. We can choose how and when and where to enter into the symbolic contract of ritual and how and what "woman" will mean in our homes, our Sunday School classes, our relationships.

I have seen too much of wise old women, wives of bishops, who are too timid to even navigate the scriptures in Relief Society. Too many of us are comfortable with the mirage of the church as a kind paternal state; we think all is well in Zion, and thus the devil leads us down to spiritual stagnancy. We must learn to trust our own authority instead of waiting for someone to tell us we're okay.

What if we step on someone's toes? What if we make a mistake? That's what this probation is for. What if we transgress "the rules"? Eve transgressed and because of her good choice we are all here. Eve is the mother of the living. Our transgressions of culturally established "rules" will bring new spiritual life. Eve was the first guerrilla girl.

The work is one-to-one, sister-to-sister, a slow-burn, a life-changing, life-saving revolution. It comes in a billion forms and a million private personal ways. It comes at dinnertime and in bedtime stories and on camping trips and in political activism and in working at battered women's shelters and maybe even through visiting teaching. It asks no one's permission. It is pure as charity and revolutionary as hell. Our authority is in each other.

Joanna Brooks is presently an MA student in English at UCLA. In response to the recent controversy over issues of academic freedom at BYU, she returned her BA degree to BYU.

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Under the Umbrella

When the Relief Society lost its financial autonomy and control over its own curriculum, its heritage was obscured and its ability to fulfil the broad vision of its original mandate was eviscerated. But women were told that becoming a correlated part of the church would place the Relief Society where certain men in authority thought it belonged—"under the umbrella of the priesthood." An interesting metaphor.

An umbrella serves to protect those underneath it from rain and sleet and snow. But how efficaciously an umbrella serves its purpose depends for the most part on how it is held. If the person holding the umbrella is mean-spirited, that person will not care if the other person is getting wet and sometimes will act in ways to ensure that the other party gets wet. Other times, without any ill-will or evil intent, the person holding the umbrella is simply oblivious to the needs of the

other party. Sometimes the person holding an umbrella simply doesn't know how to hold it in the best way, and the other person gets poked in the eye along with getting wet.

Holding an umbrella is a big responsibility and can be hard to do. I have not always successfully held an umbrella—especially when I've tried to hold it for someone much taller than myself, or for a small child, or when it's been especially windy out. How encouraging to know that women in times past have held umbrellas perfectly well! Yet most men in authority have been adept at ignoring both this fact and the fact that women today have as great a need to hold onto the umbrella as be protected by it. (And that men often need women's hands-on help in holding umbrellas in the storms of life.)

I have found that the best way to share an umbrella, when possible, is to have both parties underneath hold onto it. This is an especially good method among adults: doing so minimizes the risk of poked eyes, and maximizes the chances that the things that really must stay dry will stay dry. It also allows the holders to "even out" the wetness, if such must occur, and to selflessly give up part of the protection if they believe the other person's needs are greater than their own.

It is hard to do much of anything to avoid getting wet except to ask for greater consideration, and ask repeatedly if necessary, if one doesn't have any direct control over the umbrella. When the Relief Society was unilaterally placed under the priesthood umbrella (this was not something Belle Spafford et al requested—evidently these spiritually sensitive women didn't realize they needed protection), the impact on the local and general levels was enormous. There have been clearly negative consequences for women having to seek human male approval for projects that used to be decided upon by women and the Lord; by having no control over the pursestrings; and by having men in charge of women's curriculum. This last in particular has resulted in the silencing of women's voices within the Relief Society itself: our recycled manuals have hardly any women's voices or experiences in them. It's all male discourse; nearly all of what few women's stories have been included are told in a male voice and from a male perspective.

In short, the net result of placing the Relief Society under the umbrella of patriarchal priesthood has been to transform it into an organization of women that is run at the behest of and by permission of men—men who select the nominal female leadership. The best we've been able to hope for, under the circumstances, is that the men who run the Relief Society (generally and locally) are inspired. Sometimes they have been. Sometimes they most definitely have not been. Some men have insisted on holding an umbrella over women's heads even when the sun is shining. Sometimes some men have decided, even in the midst of a thunderstorm, that it's no longer raining and have walked off with the umbrella, leaving the umbrella-less women to fend for themselves. And then these same men criticize women for taking shelter elsewhere when the correlated Relief Society cannot meet their needs. What then? It seems past time for us to "get a grip" and regain the control we have lost.

In hopes of sunshine and parasols,
Lynn "I love a metaphor" Matthews Anderson



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