

Penumbral Polarity

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Penumbra: - 1) *Term created and introduced by astronomer Johannes Kepler in 1604 to describe the shadows that occur during eclipses.* 2) *An area in which something exists to a lesser or uncertain degree.*

There is a popular pagan chant which goes ‘We all come from the Goddess and to her we shall return’. The Goddess, and her myriad of archetypes, gives us plenty of female role-models that many other religions just don’t and this has made Paganism an attractive proposition. It is something worthy of celebration that in this post-feminist era, the multi-aspected, Great Goddess lives. But the God is getting lost in the penumbra of his own Sun, eclipsed by the Lunar Goddess. She steals his fire and presents it as her own. The pendulum is swinging too far, leaving Old Hornie out in the cold. There are two partners in the Universe’s polar dance; otherwise it is just spiritual masturbation which leads to no creation.

There are far fewer books published on the subject of Pagan gods. This is not because there are significantly fewer of them. It reflects demand and interest. How often do you see Pagan God workshops and festivals advertised? They do exist, but again, not in the quantity that the Goddess ones do. Is this indicative of an imbalance in modern Pagan attitudes?

Granted, the Goddess has recently undergone a long overdue resurrection in the West, after being largely ignored for hundreds of years (microcosmically echoing the fact that women were also of low status.) A major factor in the twentieth century success of the Goddess was the second wave of feminism which she surfed in on, complete with floral garlands and it seems, Sun block.

This movement helped to bring women’s issues and the divine feminine to the fore. In its wake, it left a society where men were less sure of their roles than they had once been. Surely, this should make it even more important that our male Gods are not forgotten, their archetypes and lessons ignored.

Perhaps we shy away from the term ‘God,’ particularly with its association with the established, patriarchal religions. In which case, we need to work on reclaiming his myths for the multi-faceted Goddesses do not tell the whole story. For example, there aren’t any whose function really touches upon the myths of Pan or Dionysus. Potent forces of nature that as modern Pagans, we should holistically embrace.

As Above, So Below

I expect most readers will be aware of the ‘as above, so below’ principle; a spiritual law of layers, connecting microcosms to macrocosms. This concept is embodied in many Pagan and magical paths. Consider, for example, the Craft Law; *‘But the Priestess should ever mind that all power comes from him [The High Priest]. It is only lent when it is used wisely and justly.’*¹ This concept is a microcosmic echo of a macrocosmic scientific fact.

The Moon, whose power is drawn down by Priestesses, does not create her own light. Her radiant beauty, her ‘power’, is only fully revealed through her reflection of the Sun’s solar rays (which also enable him to perceive his own power.) This dance of light between the Solar God and the Lunar Goddess is found in many different myths from around the world, though it is important to note that the Sun is not always seen as masculine, or the Moon, feminine. Regardless, this waltz of polarity is a vitally important one and it is the key to a good magical working partnership.

In the early initiatory traditions of Witchcraft, such as the Gardnerian and Alexandrian paths, initiatory power is usually passed from man to woman and woman to man (though exceptions can be made when initiating your own daughter or son, for example.) When in a circle, as far as possible, the aim is to be situated between two people of the opposite sex. When working magic, it is generally best to try and work with someone of the opposite sex. When people were Handfasted it wasn’t really a ‘Witch Wedding’ in the modern sense, it was more a recognition of a magical polar relationship which may also exist alongside a more mundane, Malkuthian relationship. This is because magic can be likened to an electric current and needs both a positive and negative in order for the ‘energy’ to flow. As *The Kybalion* states “Everything is dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites; like and unlike are the

same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree; extremes meet; all truths are but half-truths; all paradoxes may be reconciled.”

Men and women are intrinsically ‘different in degree,’ in ways that go beyond society’s expectations and cultural norms. The Human Genome Project found that the differences between the races is minuscule (one-hundredth of 1 percent) compared with the difference between the sexes (a whopping 1 to 2 percent)². This concept is something that the writers of *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* capitalised on. The fact that this book became a bestseller certainly suggests that it was saying something that was resonating with readers. It is this intrinsic tension of opposites that helps to ensure the flow of the magical current. Though it is important to not get too focussed on the physical sex of the participants, as the same principle, a tension caused by opposites, can also be readily utilised by gay couples.

A polar dance also occurs on an individual level, akin to the idea of the anima and animus. This is why it is so important to have looked into yourself to discover who you really are, for this will make any polarity working easier and more effective. This is where Goddess or God-biased groups do come into their own. They can provide a safe and supportive environment for you to really explore all aspects of femininity or masculinity; from the wanton, wild woman, to the Crone that births the dead, from the lustful, lambent lad to the merciless swinger of the scythe.

The idea behind polar rhythm is succinctly depicted on the Tree of Life. At the very top of the Tree you will find Ain Soph Aur, the limitless light and source of all. Its emanation comes through Kether, the crown, and then splits into the sephiroth of Binah and Chokmah; the Universal Mother and Father. As the emanation travels down through the sephiroth on the Tree, the polarity of successive spheres alternately changes; it is a dance of opposites. The very structure of the Tree of Life is also based on opposites with its black and white pillars and in the centre you have the Middle Pillar and the path of balance.

In Witchcraft, this ‘dance’ is encapsulated by the Cake and Wine ceremony where we see the power of polar forces which ‘conjoined, bring blessedness.’ This is the

‘flaming sword’, the athame, plunging down to fertilise the womb of Queen Malkuth, the Earth Goddess who births our physical bodies.

This interplay of opposites and application of fundamental occult principles can also be seen in the four, cross-quarter Sabbat’s of the Wica. Dating from the early 1950s, they were: Candlemas, Halloween, May Eve and Lammas (the Solstice’s and Equinoxes appear to have been added in the late 1950s³). The former two were assigned to the God and he was invoked. Similarly, the latter two, were ascribed to the Goddess and she would be invoked.⁴ In general Coven rites, there was also an invocation of the God on the High Priest, equivalent to the ‘Drawing Down of the Moon’ on the High Priestess.

In many respects, Gardnerian Witchcraft is fairly well-balanced. In others areas, there seems to be an imbalance and it is revealing that whilst there was an invocation of the God, there was originally no ‘Charge of the God.’ In a magical and spiritual system, based around the cycles of the God *and* the Goddess, to have no Charge for Him is quite peculiar. Later in life, Doreen Valiente, who was responsible for rewriting parts of Aradia by Charles Leland, into the ‘Charge of the Goddess’ as we know it today, also wrote a Horned God Charge to balance it.

Another manifestation of an imbalance that seems to have crept in over the last fifty years is seen in the loss of the ‘sun-metal’ bracelet which was originally worn by certain High Priests to balance the ‘moon-metal’ bracelets of the High Priestesses. This may also help to explain why current attitudes to ‘lineage’ generally trace through the High Priestesses only.

Given the polar interplay that exists elsewhere in the Book of Shadows, it seems likely that these changes are a reflection of societies changing attitudes during the feminist era which arose in the 1950s, when much of the material that was to become the basis for the Gardnerian Book of Shadows, was being cobbled together. Gardner had a deep love of the feminine and Doreen Valiente, who helped with the task of re-writing sections of the Book of Shadows, openly welcomed the increasing status of women.

The feminist influence on Modern Witchcraft and Paganism can clearly be seen in another historical example. In the middle of the last century, the early Gardnerian Craft left British shores, bound for the USA. Its influence was readily seen in the subsequent rise and popularity of Starhawk's eco-feminist Witchcraft with its emphasis on the Goddess in her many guises. Interestingly, in *Spiral Dance*, Starhawk, in direct opposition to the Craft Law mentioned earlier, states; 'His power is drawn directly from the Goddess: He participates in Her.'⁵ This shift in viewpoint was understandable, but I think that 'power' is a two way process and cannot be exclusively traced back to either the Goddess or the God. Kabbalistically speaking, think about solar Tiphareth and lunar Yesod; two, middle-pillar sephiroth linked by the Hebrew letter Samekh - the prop. This path, equated with the tarot card Temperance, suggests a two-way support system based on harmony and equilibrium.

The problem with the inequality that appears to exist in some areas of modern Witchcraft, and I am talking more generally here now, goes beyond the influence of feminism. Modern Witchcraft's pro-feminine public persona influences the type of people that are attracted to it. The Craft seems to give the impression of having strong and dominant women. Certainly, some of the earliest High Priestesses were known for their commanding presence and reflected a society where women were now finally being heard. Understandably, this attracts men who are attracted to that aspect of a woman's power. This is an example of polarity you may say, so surely, magically, that is a good thing. Well in one way, yes it is. But it also means that Priests tend to fade into the background, eclipsed by the High Priestess, thereby leading to the 'God' deficit that we see today.

There is a real danger that by staying in these sorts of unequally polarised roles and by not thoroughly exploring all aspects of ones being, the light and the dark, the anima and the animus, only half of the story is being told. It is all too easy to slip into the role of a High Priestess with a permanent 'Goddess-head' on. A good magical practitioner must be flexible and adapt and channel the appropriate energy depending on what any particular ritual or Sabbat requires.

Maybe it is time to ask ourselves, are we as women perhaps afraid of the power of an unleashed God? Are we afraid of losing our status as women; we certainly battled

long and hard enough for it! Similarly, perhaps men are afraid of appearing politically incorrect or even worse, being seen in the circle with Priapic euphoria!

As workers in a magical tradition, I think we have a responsibility to try and work from a place of balance. We are microcosmic reflections of the macrocosm and what we do feeds back into the Great Web of being, which in turn, feeds back down to us and creates the world in which we live. To focus too much on just the Moon, or the Sun, the Goddess or the God, is to deny something fundamental.

The Goddess is alive and so is the God. He is a boy, a father, a lover, a warrior, a hero, a reaper, and many more besides. He dances across the heavens, locked in a cosmic embrace with the Goddess. Together they shine magnanimously. Theirs is a polar dance of equality, not one of penumbral polarity.

¹ The Gardnerian Craft Laws can be readily found on the www and in various books.

² http://dir.salon.com/story/opinion/feature/2005/03/02/gender_differences/index.html

³ Fred Lamond, *Fifty Years of Witchcraft*. Green magic, 200 p16.

⁴ Doreen Valiente's first BoS AKA 'Text C' p38

⁵ Starhawk *Spiral Dance* Harper Collins, 1989 p111.