

Chapter 8: Passion

Passion drives us to extremes. It is the root of our most dramatic acts.

Most of nature is driven by visceral passions. The hungry animal will fight for food. The socialization of this urge in humans evolved into codes of martial honor. The warrior was expected to serve his brothers-in-arms to the fullest extent of his capabilities. As the code evolved, it encompassed honor and respect for worthy adversaries.

All animals compete for reproductive opportunity, sometimes violently. In social insects, drones will sacrifice themselves to conserve the reproductive potential of the hive. It is only in the mammals that we generally find mothers willing to sacrifice themselves for their young. The socialization of this urge in humans evolved into the maternal rites. These were not tea parties. The pre-marital rites in Rome involved physical deprivation and flogging intended to assess a woman's capacity to survive childbirth.

As primitive tribes evolved into organized societies, the relative power of the martial and maternal passions varied from place to place. In some cultures, a synthesis took place. Given our understanding of spirit, we may see in a different light the Greek myth of the birth of Athena: the Goddess of Wisdom sprang fully armored from the throbbing skull of her father Zeus. A creation of pure spirit, balancing strength and intuition, formed in the mind of spirit!

Much as in the insect hive, the human investment in their Gods made their preservation a matter of human passion. As religious rites became established, the citizen's integration with the deity deepened. So did the value to the deity of popular recognition. In many places, deities were openly competitive, fomenting antagonism between their adherents. The Judaic solution was monotheism: only a single God was acknowledged. As documented in Deuteronomy, their narrow-mindedness made integration with other cultures extremely difficult.

In Greece, these conflicts were managed through assignment of deities to adoptive city states. Still, the human elites had an organized practice of consolidation. The original thirty deities were reorganized as twelve. The diverse character of the remaining figures impeded further consolidation. Worse, they were a notoriously petty and self-serving lot, treating Humanity more as playthings than as partners. Taking seriously the physical basis of spirituality, we might expect that the deities themselves would have worked to impede further integration.

Two paths forward were explored. The Greek Stoics emphasized the human virtues.

May I be no one's enemy, and may I be the friend of that which is eternal and abides.

May I wish for every person's happiness, and envy none.

May I never rejoice in the ill fortune of one who has wronged me.

May I, to the extent of my power, give needful help to all who are in want.

May I never fail a friend.

May I respect myself.

*May I always keep tame that which rages within me.
May I accustom myself to be gentle, and never be angry with
others because of circumstances.
May I know good people and follow in their footsteps.*

Stoicism was an attempt to build a Spirit of Virtue free of primitive corruption.

The Stoic's Code was entirely exemplary, but they were operating in hostile territory. On a parallel path, the Athenian philosophers introduced the concept of a single God. Impeded at least in part by the sexual segregation of Greek society, the transition was glacial.

Then the Judaic and Greek cultures collided in Palestine.

Deicentrism on the Brink

In the American South, the Civil Rights movement challenged long-standing assumptions about social roles and status. As the movement gathered power, the beneficiaries of segregation were forced to reconsider ideas and behaviors that permeated every aspect of their lives. The violent passion of their reaction to peaceful protests demonstrates the disruptive implications of such a process. Segregation was implemented by a pervasive physical and social infrastructure. Removing that infrastructure was a costly prospect. Replacing it could not take place until a new social consensus was established. And until it was replaced, how were people that depended upon the system to survive?

The Middle East found itself in a maelstrom of such changes at the time that Jesus of Nazareth was born, certainly among the most significant in human history. We would expect a great passion to arise in that context.

Foremost was the evolution of powerful social and economic systems independent from the moral authority of religion. Prior to this time, political authority was closely associated with spiritual authority. Political leaders were over-matched by the power of dieties, and so close collaboration with religious authorities was required. About the time of , this condition was changing. The change was widespread.

Greek philosophy and political culture escaped the constraints of their pantheon through wholesale relocation to Rome. While the pantheon followed, the scale of Roman civilization was already too vast, and human scope for independent action was sustained.

In Palestine, the aftermath of subjugation under Alexander and then Persia brought the Jewish elites to a judgment that their culture could not survive unless it emulated the civil scope of the three great cultures of the region. Significant portions of Exodus and Deuteronomy appear to have been written during the Diaspora in Babylon. By casting the Jews as the architects of Ancient Egypt, Exodus projects a cultural tradition of civil accomplishment. Deuteronomy establishes a religious rationale for armed conflict, and promulgates a coercive theological psychology to prepare the people for an extended conflict for control of Palestine.

The initial surge was successful, the Greeks being ousted upon the return from Babylon.

Independence lasted a short while, with the Romans reconquering Palestine shortly before Jesus' birth. The Romans were sophisticated judges of human nature, and established willing proxies in Palestine. Despite the onerous burden of Roman occupation, the Jewish rulers were able to continue their construction program. The monuments they commissioned were recognized as jewels in the Empire.

The construction program created a deep crisis of faith. In order to capture the funding to accomplish these works, the socialist codes had to be dismantled, allowing aggregation of property to facilitate taxation. The Jewish field hand became little more than an indentured servant.

Those who have been in the presence of an exploited people know the spiritual costs. American natives, Tibetans and Russian proles are all recent examples. They all share the characteristic of a deep attachment to the land. As they are cut off from the connection, the land suffers as well. Think of it as a power substation after a fire: where once energy was free to flow through the spiritual fabric, as people are torn away the flow becomes uneven and inefficient. Given their deeper integration with the fabric of Life, women would have felt this disintegration most intensely.

I have implied that women have a parallel spiritual history, largely excluded from that documented by men. As a male, it would be folly to represent what follows as definitive. At this point, however, I think that it would be greater folly to attempt to sidestep the issue of women's spirituality. Something happened in Palestine that I believe was totally unexpected by those that engineered the process, and I believe that the motivations and role of women were central to that outcome. What follows are reasonable inferences from established feminine psychology, but the story is substantiated only partly by documentation, dogma or creed.

One of the natural precepts of monotheistic faiths is that their God will eventually be recognized by all the peoples of the Earth. In ancient societies built around the authority of a holy king, the inference that follows is that the world would be ruled by a king born of the tradition. In Judaism, that figure is called the Messiah.

While men may participate in identifying and organizing the characteristics of a Messianic personality, the role of focusing and binding that personality to a child belongs to women. As the vital force of Jewish Manhood became lost first in dissecting the minutiae of the Law, and then in visions of material glory, the potential to effect the binding of Messiah to flesh fled from the sisterhood.

So we see that Palestine was the fulcrum of powerful spiritual passions. The Ancient Deities of Greece were threatened with annihilation. The survival of the Humanist tradition evolved by the Greeks was at stake. The collapse of the Jewish social contract was imminent. And the sisterhood's 3000-year investment in civilizing masculine predation was evaporating.

Fisher of Humanity

Humanity's great spiritual figures express a love for life in all of its forms. In most cases, this is interpreted as divine magnanimity. This reflects the perspective of those they love. But from their

perspective, things may seem less unbalanced. The joy of personalities such as Jesus is to possess the perception that allows Life to channel itself towards perfection. Being the focus of that process is to experience frequently the discovery of joy by the world around you.

One of the challenges in appreciating that experience is to grasp the fluidity of the focus of such a consciousness. One metaphor is of the reader discovering that the question mark conveys the perfect sense, after the word that conveys the perfect need, in the sentence that grasps the essential question, in a paragraph that characterizes a central doubt, in a chapter that analyzes a social issue, in a book that focuses a social movement, in a library occupied by great thinkers, in a city that harnesses the creative powers of its citizens...and on and on until the purpose of Life is manifest.

Similarly, Life expands from the cell into tissue, organ, body, ecosystem, region, continent and globe. When love dissolves resistance to the flow of consciousness into Life, our minds can find themselves anywhere in that hierarchy, as the Spirit of Life has need for a reconciling perspective.

In the New Testament, the most celebrated demonstrations of this facility are healings. Jesus' perspective on these occasions is fairly consistent: "Your faith has healed you." Faith is trust in the power of love. When that trust is given, Spirit moves freely through us, creating the patterns in matter that we need to manifest our purpose in the world.

Equally profound, and perhaps more important, were the interior transformations in those that encountered Jesus. As the era lacked a foundation in psychology, these changes are poorly characterized in the Gospels. They are best manifested, perhaps, through the power of the works performed by the Apostles and Disciples after Jesus' death.

In a culture that pigeon-holed them as weak and dangerously sinful, this experience must have been especially profound for the women that worked with Jesus. The raw force of Life moves through women. It makes them vulnerable to spiritual fears and demands that Men find easy to ignore. In the presence of a man such as Jesus, all that falls away, and a lady can experience herself simply as she is, in full and secure awareness of the creative potential at her disposal.

Love Alone

While Jesus spoke the essential words of prophecy throughout the period of his ministry, I have a sense that the death of John the Baptist wrought a profound change in his spirit. Of all those in his orbit, only John spoke out with the same courage and conviction possessed by . As long as he was alive, I think that Jesus could harbor hope that Humanity could turn aside from the path that lay before us. After the Baptist's death, Jesus seemed bent on a grim path of provocation that would cause his death.

The process was terrifying to behold. When Jesus was taken into custody, none of his Disciples went with him. They all stood aside, some even denying him. After weeks of deftly trapping the Pharisees in their own words, Jesus openly claimed his deity, providing them the legal pretext they need to destroy him. Taken by Pilate before the people of Jerusalem, he is denounced and set on the path to the cross.

Of his close associates, only one is consistently mentioned as present at the crucifixion: Mary Magdalene. In all the stories of the Resurrection, she is the first to hear the news. One account in the gospels reports that Jesus healed Mary of possession by seven demons. Clearly, this was a woman through whom life moved powerfully. The closeness of the relationship between Mary and Jesus was a scandal among the Apostles.

As she stood watching his crucifixion, what would have been her intent? Women bind spirit to flesh, and her every desire must have been to preserve his presence among us. The tools given to women are not the tools of transformation, they are tools that support and sustain. There is no doubt that she suffered the Passion with him, holding him together while he strove to accomplish the work that had been set before him.

In the transition from life to death – between connection to flesh and rebirth – the spirit walks freely in time. Anchored to the crucifix by Mary's selfless love, wandered the ages, refocusing and redirecting the energies that had been marshaled against him. Nature joined the struggle, the sky darkening for three hours as the power of the sun flowed into him. When he finally had walked all the way through to the end of the struggle, he returned. With the words "It is finished", his spirit escaped his flesh.

In celebration of her role, on the day of his rebirth he chose Mary as his messenger. She had arrived to tend to his body. Her worldly concern is revealing, both in the focus of her trip, and in her reaction to the disappearance of his body. Until himself appears, she assumes that the body has been moved!

And so it becomes clear to him, this grand manipulator of affairs, that she had not served for Humanity. She had not served for the hope of nations. She had not served for a vision of earthly perfection. She had served only him, the man she loved.

And what would he have been, without that gift in perfect innocence? Where could the path of grace lay, if she did not walk in grace with him?

As in the years since Eden, so in the years since the cross: men have struggled against that partnership. We have battered and bartered the power of Life that flows through women. Without opportunity for creative expression, it has turned back upon us in pain and fear. Enough! It is time that we joined powers to break down the barriers between us, and achieve the only partnership able to save the world.