

Neither Matriarchy nor Patriarchy
Sunday, June 16, 2024
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lake County
Eustis, FL
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I am the oldest of three children. There is me, then my brother and then a sister. I was not the baby girl dressed in pinks but in yellows, yellow being my father's favorite color.

My father was a hands-on Dad. He changed diapers and gave babies baths. He took one of us at a time along in the oil delivery truck if he was going to a dairy farm or somewhere else he thought might interest us. He had us pick strawberries in the garden alongside him and he built us a swing set.

Once giving one of us a bath when an infant Dad lost his grip and baby fell or more likely slid into the sink. It became an ongoing family joke. If one of us children did anything particularly stupid, we must be the one that Dad dropped in the sink.

But Dad was not the incompetent Dad of the sitcoms. We knew he could build things and fix things. But I was surprised one day in my teens or young adulthood when my mother commented that she and Dad had the savings they did thanks to him. She was the one who always paid the bills and did the taxes. I was surprised to hear that Dad had an influential role in their money management.

I once asked my mother what brought her and dad together. They seemed so different. She liked to read. He liked to do things with his hands. She was interested in Bible study and Egyptian tombs. He was interested in fruit trees and raising chickens. Mom said they had shared values.

What I knew from little on up is that my parents had a respect for one another. They were partners in life. One did not dominate the other.

My parents would have been shocked to realize that their relationship was crucial in my openness to the feminist theology I was introduced to as I attended seminary in the 1980s. One of my textbooks was Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion. It contained essays like "Motherearth and the Megamachine" by Rosemary Radford Ruether and "After the Death of God the Father" by Mary Daly and "What Became of God the Mother?" by Elaine Pagels.

Mary Daly wrote, "The Judaic-Christian tradition has served to legitimate sexually imbalanced patriarchal society. Thus, for example, the image of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in 'his' heaven is a father ruling 'his' people, then it is in the 'nature' of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male dominated."

Elaine Pagels writes of feminine positive gnostic Christian views of God and human relationships in contrast to what became the patriarchal orthodox Christian views, but she also names one orthodox theologian as having more progressive views. She says, “Clement (of Alexandria) characterizes God not only in masculine but also in feminine terms...in describing human nature, he insists that ‘men and women share equally in perfection, and are to receive the same instruction and discipline... (and) in considering the active participation of women with men in the Christian community Clement offers a list – unique in orthodox tradition- of women whose achievements he admires.”

In more recent years as I receive emails related to the LGBTQ+ experience I have come to learn of the mahu of Hawaii. A documentary [Kuma Hina](#) from 2015 tells the story of “Hina Wong-Kula, a transgender native Hawaiian teacher and cultural icon who brings to life Hawaii’s long-held embrace of mahu – those who embody both male and female spirit, and were traditionally respected as caretakers, healers, and keepers of ancient traditions,” [Kumu Hina | Preserving Hawaiian Tradition | Independent Lens | PBS](#). In 2022 a children’s picture book [Kapaemahu](#) was published. The Amazon blurb says in part, “In the 15th century, four Mahu sail from Tahiti to Hawaii and share their gifts of science and healing with the people of Waikiki. The islanders return this gift with a monument of four boulders in their honor, which the Mahu imbue with healing powers before disappearing.

“As time passes, foreigners inhabit the island and the once-sacred stones are forgotten until the 1960s. Though the true story of these stones was not fully recovered, the power of the Mahu still calls out to those who pass by them at Waikiki Beach today.”

The power of us all; male, female, trans, cis, gender queer; the power of us all calls out to be used, to be used for the benefit of us all. My parents would be surprised, maybe even shocked, to learn that they taught me this, but they did.

There is a piece in our hymnals by American feminist Marge Piercy. It assumes a gender binary but otherwise the point is clear. Councils by Marge Piercy.

“We must sit down
and reason together.
We must sit down.
Men standing want to hold forth.
They rain down upon faces lifted.

“We must sit down on the floor
on the earth
on stones and mats and blankets.
There must be no front to the speaking
no platform, no rostrum,
no stage or table.
We will not crane
to see who is speaking.

“Perhaps we should sit in the dark.
In the dark we could utter our feelings.
In the dark we could propose
and describe and suggest.

“In the dark we could not see who speaks
and only the words
would say what they say.

“Thus saying what we feel and what we want,
what we fear for ourselves and each other
into the dark, perhaps we could begin
to begin to listen.

“Perhaps we should talk in groups
small enough for everyone to speak.

“Perhaps we should start by speaking softly.
The women must learn to dare to speak.

“The men must bother to listen.

“The women must learn to say, I think this is so.

“The men must learn to stop dancing solos on
the ceiling.
After each speaks, she or he
will repeat a ritual phrase:

“It is not I who speaks but the wind.
Wind blows through me.
Long after me, is the wind.”

Piercy was raised Jewish. She would know the Hebrew word “ruach.” It means wind. It also means breath. And it also means spirit. It is creative force. The first use in the Bible is in the first chapter of Genesis. “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” In Numbers it is used to describe what gives us life, “the LORD, the God who gives breath to all living things.” In the prophet Isaiah Ruach is used in this passage, “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord,” [What is the meaning of the Hebrew word ruach? | GotQuestions.org](http://www.GotQuestions.org).

“After each speaks, she or he will repeat a ritual phrase:

“It is not I who speaks but the wind.
Wind blows through me.
Long after me, is the wind.”

Ruach, the empowering spirit, speaks through us all. That means that men should not dominate. Women should not dominate. Clergy should not dominate. Whites should not dominate. No one should dominate. All should be equal.

As our own Declaration of Independence declares with some slight edits to include more than men, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all ... are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among (us), deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

My parents worked together to ensure the safety and happiness of a family. They knew that they had to take the safety and happiness of every family member into consideration and not just one or some of them. And they also knew that that meant listening to their children and knowing what we needed and wanted and what we were capable of doing in the family.

In a society of equality, not a matriarchy, not a patriarchy, not a theocracy, we all nurture one another and ourselves. So, on this Father’s Day I end with this reading by Unitarian Universalist minister Evan Carvill Ziemer.

“I believe in fathering

“I believe in the radical idea that men have the full human capacity to nurture

“Hair bows and baseballs
Cooking and creativity
Tools and tiaras
Camping and dancing
Snuggles and shrieks of delight

“Too many fathers don’t believe in their own fathering

“Too many are scarred by their own fathers to hear their heart say otherwise

“Too many have known fathers who, faced with a quivering lip and tears, could only say ‘man up.’

“Too many have known fathers who knew only yelling and hitting

“Too many have known fathers who lost sight of their sacred role of protector and became tormentor

“But I believe in fathering.

“When a human being gestates and gives birth their brain changes permanently.

“A father’s brain changes permanently too—changes as he rocks his baby to sleep, delights in baby games, and soothes bumps and bruises. A father earns his new neurobiology.

“In a world where too many mothers hand their co-parent directions more specific than those given to the babysitter;

“Where a father out with his kids is asked, ‘Are you babysitting?’ and ‘Where’s mom?’;

“Where fathers are the punch line,

“I believe in fathering. I believe in the radical idea that men have the full human capacity to nurture.

“Whether their children come through birth, adoption, or fostering; through scouts, sports, Sunday school, or youth group

“I’ve known too many gay dads, too many single fathers, too many men raising children others couldn’t to believe otherwise.

“I believe we all—especially our children—deserve to know that the human capacity to nurture belongs to every one of us.

“I believe in fathering.”

The human capacity to nurture belongs to every one of us, and it is from that capacity that we should govern ourselves. For what is governance but the nurturing of a community? Speak. Act. Allow the empowering spirit to guide our nurture in love.