

Taking Our Eyes Off the Guys

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All of us—all women in patriarchy—are seasoned to be slaves, are seasoned to be prostitutes. All of us, in some sense, are, or have been, prostitutes and slaves, and most of us will continue to be for the rest of our lives. And it is the essence, the very nature of seasoning, to blind us—to our condition as well as to the mechanics of our enslavement.

Those of us, however, who grew up in and were seasoned in traditional, fundamentalist Judeo-Christian environments, got a closer look at the mechanics of that seasoning process than some others. And although we're sometimes matronized in the movement—the assumption being that if we could ever have believed that preposterous, dangerous nonsense, we can never again be trusted to be clear—the truth is that we can probably be trusted *more* to have kept the vision of feminism clear once we had seen it than those of you who grew up as Unitarians or Quakers or even Methodists and Presbyterians because, you see, we saw patriarchy naked before us all the time, all around us all day long, every day.

And what we knew, what we realized as soon as we were able to *see* what we were seeing and to reject it—wrench it out of our souls and throw it all away—what we were left with was the understanding of the patriarchal family as the model for all oppression: the patriarchal family with the man on top as god and the women and children as worm under him—and far too often very literally under him.

We understood then that that paradigm—that power-over paradigm, that sadomasochistic paradigm which is patriarchy—extends to everything, that it is the model for all social institutions, for all economic structures, for international politics. It's white on top in male position as god, people of color underneath in woman position as worm.

It's the rich as male on top, the poor as female on the bottom. It's humans on top, all other living things on the bottom. It's large on top, small on the bottom—large countries as male, small countries as female—and so on.

Now where we learn that this is "natural" and "normal" is in the family. All of us had one of those, and some of them, as I say, were more blatantly patriarchal than others. Some of us got a really thorough-going education, and as was said in my introduction, I got one of the best there ever was! I'm grateful to the Mormon elders for a truly matchless education in patriarchal ontology. I can't be fooled again, and neither can you graduated Catholics or any others of you who were true believers in any religion.

When I say that all women have been seasoned as slaves and prostitutes, I'm talking about seasoning that began at home. All other societal institutions avidly participated in it, of course. But no matter how we're seasoned—as prostitute or as wife, which is the same thing—we're seasoned in the patriarchal family almost exclusively to serve sexual functions.

No matter what form seasoning takes, it always has the same goal—to make us feel worthless and dependent. Obviously, incest is a seasoning tool par excellence; one incident of incest is really all that is necessary to teach us our role in patriarchy. It is such a profound betrayal of trust, primarily of our trust in ourselves. It is designed to make us feel powerless, to shatter our inner core of confidence, and therefore to make us feel utterly dependent on men. It functions to make us believe passionately that we need a savior, that men must save us, that we have to go through them to be saved. That somehow we've got to get them to *change their minds* about us. We've got to make them agree that their behavior is terrible and get them to stop it. Our seasoning teaches us nonsense: that we've got to get the slaveholders to free the slaves.

That's the goal of seasoning: to make us believe that we must always go through someone else to be free. Of course, the reason we're taught this is because freedom never happens that way. Tyrants never free the slaves. It's an historical truth that the oppressed must always rise and free themselves, and in freeing themselves, free everyone. The truth is that radical change, change at the root, must be made by *us*.

There are many reasons for our being in the only position, historically speaking, to change things. One of these is the basic paradox of tyranny, that the oppressors are always less free than the oppressed. Another is that, as women, we are truly outside men's system. Virginia Woolf said that, you know. She said in *Three Guineas* that women are the Society of the Outsiders, that that's where we have our power.

We have power—meaning the ability to act, to effect change—outside the system because that's where we truly live, politically, psychically; it is therefore the only place where we are authentic, and we can only have power where we are authentic. We also have power there because being outside and being slaves means being flexible; slaves have to be almost preternaturally flexible in order to survive. And one of the most important laws of cybernetics is that the most flexible element in any system is the controlling element. Privileges are chains. Men are bound by their privilege, have no flexibility, cannot change their system even if they wished—and they don't wish. Being the most flexible elements in this system, women are now in control of the planet. Our behavior, not the men's, will determine the course of human events.

But conditioned, seasoned as we are, this is the most difficult possible conception for us, and most of us continue to believe that we must make *men* change their ways, that we are dependent upon legislators to pass laws, for instance. Good grief! When have those in control ever given up a significant amount of it to those they control? Can you think of a single time in history?

Well, it has never happened and it's not going to happen. We should have learned that with the Equal Rights Amendment. If we didn't learn it then, what is it going to take to teach it to us? Our not learning it is part of our seasoning, our profound conditioning. We're deeply dependent, deeply servile in ways that our surface militance camouflages.

That is the main goal of seasoning: to make us believe the men must change the world for us and that we're powerless to change reality unless the men change first. But the truth is that they're not *going* to change—*can't* change—so we don't have to waste our time trying to get them to any more. *We* are the ones who must change, because we *can*. And when *we* change, everything outside us will have to change to accommodate our new way of being in the world—including men, but that's beside the point.

The principle underlying all seasoning—how you get this effect, how you reach this goal of getting women to believe that our salvation depends on someone else's behavior—is that you get someone to do everything *in relation* to someone else who they perceive as more powerful; you get them always to consult an image of someone else in their minds, to say to themselves—to say to ourselves as women, for instance—“Now, how will the *men* respond to that?” every time we make a decision, or “If we do this, what will *they* do?” Always to be relational, to consult the masters in our psyches every time—this is bondage.

When women make our internal states, our well-being, contingent upon men's behavior, behavior we can neither control nor change, we

give up all chance for independence and freedom. Our freedom must depend exclusively on us; we are the only ones we can change and control.

We must understand and internalize the fact that men are totally irrelevant now as far as change is concerned. So we can take our eyes off them and look at ourselves to make a shining new reality right here, right now in the midst of the old putrescent, collapsing world of the fathers.

As long as we're focused on the men, we're never going to see that the door to our jail cell is open, that it's open *not* into patriarchy but into our own power. As long as we're concentrating on the men, doing everything with our pimps in mind, we're never going to break free. Our pimps are the men around us. They're the legislators, professors, ministers—none of you still *has* ministers or priests, I trust? Our pimps are our fathers, our husbands, our sons. To be everything in relation to them is slavery.

I learned this as a prostitute-in-training in Mormondom, in a Mormon home as well as the church. And in the Democratic Party. And in liberal and progressive and leftist groups. And in the National Organization for Women, which is modeled, also, on the patriarchal family. I learned these things in the same place *you* learned them. We have all learned them the hard way.

When I escaped from Mormonism, I looked out and saw that all churches were the Mormon church. I looked out further and saw that the whole world was the Mormon church. Over the years as I kept looking, I saw that Congress and the legislatures and the political parties and *Mother Jones* and National Public Radio were also all the Mormon church—you know, "Nothing New Considered," "The Same Old Stuff Considered." I saw that they were all the Old Boys' Club.

I decided I wasn't going to escape from one brothel just to get myself trapped in another; that something was basically wrong with thinking that any of these institutions was the New World. So it seemed to me that it was time for me to take my eyes off the guys, to get rid of the superstitious belief that if I didn't monitor every single thing they did, if I didn't clutch at them and beg them and plead with them and lobby them and kick and scream and stamp my foot and demand, they would go berserk and kill us all.

But this is nonsense, of course, because all evidence shows that men have gone berserk *anyway*. With our eyes fastened unblinkingly on their faces day and night for thousands of years, they have grown increasingly mad. With our attention *riveted* upon them they are killing us and the world around us daily. The evidence is that with our reactive, fearful, dependent behavior we have been facilitating patriarchy in all its

manifestations throughout its history. We have been seasoned to do this, to keep our eyes on our patriarchs, our pimps, so we won't look at ourselves and see the stunning alternatives.

I saw that since it hadn't gotten us anywhere, it was time to stop doing that. We don't have a thousand years to get enough women in our legislatures and our Congress. And even if we did, they would all be female impersonators by the time they got there, anyway.

We don't have time. We've only got, maybe, ten years. That means we've got to learn from history that resistance to and cooperation with the oppressor don't work. All the ways we've tried to change things didn't work. They didn't work! Hierarchical structures don't work. They are all copies of the patriarchal family, a paradigm that has failed us utterly.

So I've decided it's time for me to refuse that seasoning. It's time to deprogram myself and to stop concentrating at all times upon the masters, upon the pimps of the world, stop doing all I do in relation to them, in reference to them, in reaction to them; stop making my feelings of well-being contingent on their behavior; stop thinking about them—they are so *boring*, so numbingly boring! We can predict everything they will do, every savage, gruesome, gross, crass thing they're going to do. We know it all by heart. We don't need to watch it anymore, do we? Do you? I certainly don't. I've seen plenty of it, and I know it inside out.

It seems to me that what I have to do is what my deep conditioning tells me *not* to do, to do the thing that scares me most of all, to do what I've been taught *never* to do or I would die—and that is to take my eyes off the guys and to take *myself* seriously. To stop enabling men's system, patriarchy. To stop believing that they are going to change the world, that I ever have to try to get them to do anything redemptive again. They will not, *could* not if they would. And to come to grips with the truth that if I want the world another way, I must make it that way *myself*.

The most important message my wise old woman within has ever given me is that the transformation of this world is up to me—and you. What a relief! Thank goodness it's up to the women because now it will get done!