

# My Floating Third Gender

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I had a dream not long ago.

*I am riding on a chestnut horse in a thick green forest. I am a female knight in shining armor. Branches covered with leaves of deep green rustle against my armor. I am comfortable on my horse in this forest. I am travelling with a male companion on his own horse beside me. I see in the distance a medieval castle and we ride right into it. The hall is bathed in yellow and orange colours coming from stained glass windows positioned high on the castle walls. The light is reflecting onto the floor and rising back up the wall. My riding partner is beside me; as we get off our horses, we walk into a very large dining hall and we become one. My mother and stepfather are sitting at an expansive dining table. I tell them that some of my published papers are being used in universities both in Europe and in California. They listen with great respect and acknowledgement of my new position in life.*

One of the mysteries that I explore inside myself is what is feminine, what is masculine and what is the embedded patriarchy, what is in me that has been prescribed as feminine and masculine. My feminine nature is the part of me that is reflecting upon this writing and in touch with her feelings while doing so. In terms of my masculine nature, I see action. Imagine taking a walking step with energy filling your body; that for me is my masculine. In other words, the receptive writer and observer gathering the information on how to develop this paper is my feminine nature and the willingness to take the actions necessary to write this paper and present it forward is my masculine nature. When we leave it at that, I can say that at present, while struggling with this paper, my feminine and masculine natures are integrated.

The struggle begins with what I call the third gender in me; others call this the patriarchy, but I would like to explore it as I experience it. At a deep level, I experience patriarchy as a third floating gender. This is a place in me that defines my own masculinity as the active place within me, which takes action for the sake of being "on top of", or needing to be the best or roaring like a wild animal à la Robert Bly. I ask myself: is this masculine? Or is this simply a definition of patriarchy disguised as the "nouveau masculine", while what we are trying to do is rediscover the original masculine in ourselves. The third gender in me experiences my feminine nature as receptive and reflective, but then I have to match so many accessories to it. I must be demure, maternal, thin and the best. As I come forth with my reflections, those accessories are demanded of me as much by my own third floating internal gender as they sometimes are by the men and women in my life.

One of the important points that I am trying to make is that we are all patriarchal in terms of definitions of feminine and masculine and we all struggle with this floating third gender within us. The confusion not only lies in how we define feminine and masculine within our own sense of selves, but also in how we define the men and women by gender in our lives. We often get the definition of masculine within us and in our male counterparts confused. For example, I heard some young men at a party having an animated conversation about intimate relationships in the kitchen. One of the young men was talking proudly about his brother having at last found his "getting laid voice". I expressed my shock and dismay that this could be viewed as a progressive step towards being able to have an intimate relationship. The men were confused by my response; they explained to me that the women in their lives often wanted them to be on top and to show their masculinity in such a defined way. This confusion of our third floating gender lies in old patriarchal wounds in all of us. The integration of masculine and feminine within us can only occur through a personal investigation of this third gender within us; by us, I mean both men and women.

If we were to explore and re-experience the original patriarchal wounds that lie at the foundation of our third floating gender by going within, finding the problem and remedying it through nurturing the self, then both men and women would have their feminine nature engaged. Our masculine nature would then affect this new perspective by changing our actions in our own personal lives and in the world. It seems to me that this change can only occur when the personal internal struggle is taken on an emotional and spiritual plane. Perhaps our embodied selves know this at a very deep spiritual level, akin to our ancestors, who were more engaged with the feminine and masculine within themselves.

If the wounds that lay buried in a confused ball in our internalized collective third gender could start to heal through this kind of exploration, it could lead to the end of all the blaming back and forth that takes place in our lives. We could stop blaming "mothers" and "men". The integration of the redefined feminine and masculine and true recognition of the third gender in all of us would lead to a new sense of integrity. Each of us could then get on with our individual personal self and vision.

My personal history demanded of me to live entirely in my third gender feminine self. My family felt that I was such a "sensitive" being that the future vision that I should hold for myself should be as the mother of ten children married to a university professor. The division of my feminine and masculine self came early in life for me, as I suspect it does for all human beings in varied ways. I would say that my struggle to invite my masculine self forward within myself did not start until my early thirties, shortly after the birth of my daughter. I felt a strong urge within me to be active, to secure a place for myself career-wise in order to be able to better protect and care for my

daughter. I have worked very hard since then to marry my reflective and my active self into one embodied being and to stop blaming.

My own interpretation of my dream is that I have arrived at a new place within my psyche. I am the reflective professor; I married myself. This new place has benefitted both my relationships and me.