

Baubo and the Eight Gates

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My story is about Baubo/Iambe of Greece, the bawdy crone. She is also Uzume of Japan, Mayauel of Mesoamerica, Scandlach of Scotland, Sheila-Na-Gig, and other apotropaic crones (Lubell, 1994). Baubo is associated with the frog, sharing the frog's ability of metamorphosis. She represents the stage of life when a person, particularly a woman, has passed through all eight gates and claimed all the seven intrinsic rights: the elder, the juicy crone. She becomes the "virgin" again, responsible to herself, yet concerned with the well-being of the community.

When Demeter was sitting by a well in Eleusis, too depressed and exhausted from looking for news of Persephone, a old woman or nurse, Baubo or Iambe, (depending on the version, or in the Roman version, an old man) saw her and tried to help her. In some versions, Demeter was brought to the home where the woman worked.

Baubo offered Demeter a stool when Demeter would not sit in a chair, and gave her a drink of special herbs, and finally when Demeter did not respond, Baubo told her dirty jokes and raised her skirt to expose herself to Demeter. This "gesture to turn away evil" made Demeter laugh, and was the first step to allowing Demeter to deal with her anger and depression, so that she could get on with her quest.

The Iambe version says that Iambe became the first priestess of Demeter. In any case, part of the Eleusinian procession involved a number of women who "spoke many jests" at the initiates on the way to the ceremony. The rites of Bast in Egypt were similar, with ribald women floating down the Nile, talking trash to the women on the banks (Lubell 1994). Even in historical times, the power of women's sexuality was recognized

and honored or bound and locked away so completely that the only initiation that many people can imagine for a girl is her first sexual experience. According to Trethewey:

Age ideology is troublesome because it prepares professional women to expect and demand little as they age, diminishes women's individual and collective experiences and treats rejuvenation through consumption as the only means of staving off eventual decline. (2001, p.186)

Girls, women, and old ladies too need to know that their individuation and connection to Self is what is important, and their sexuality, sensuality, and libido is part of that connection until their release into the non-physical.

The Eight of Cups in the Rider-Wait tarot deck depicts an elder walking towards distant mountains behind eight cups. The Seven of Cups card shows that each cup holds an image of beauty, fantasy, riches, or other images. But in the Eight, the self has moved on past illusions and losses of the world to find the truth of the Self.

Erik Erikson describes eight crises of life, the last one being Integrity vs. Dismay or Despair. (p. 157) The successful negotiation of this crisis results in Wisdom, the sense of being able to face death because one has come to peace with how one has faced life.

Angeles Arrien starts at Erikson's last crisis to describe the eight gates of the second half of life that lead to wisdom, which seem to mirror Carter's intrinsic rights as in

Table 1:

| Erikson (from Carter, p. ix) | Arrien (p xv) | Carter, (p. ix) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Trust/Distrust | New Experiences | Right to BE and to need |
| Autonomy / Shame & Doubt | Changing Identities | To separate and be oneself |
| Identity / role confusion | Intimacy/ Sexuality | Bliss, sensuality, and lovability |
| Intimacy / Isolation | Relationships | |
| Industry / Inferiority | Generativity | Autonomy with support |
| Initiative / Guilt | Authenticity | To speak ones own truth |
| Integrity / Despair | Grace | Spirituality |
| | Non-Attachment | |

Table 1. Comparison of Stages of life

Arrien's eight gates: silver, picket fence, clay, black and white, rustic, bone, natural, and golden develop each of the intrinsic rights of the elder. The silver gate, which brings to me images of silver hair, and the silver snakes of my painting, indicate that the lessons of the first half of life need recertification. New experiences and changing responses get our attention as we begin to be reborn as elders. We claim the right to BE and to need. The picket fence gate calls for the need for new identity, with its own need, but we do get to "know what we know now" as we claim our right to separate from societal expectations. We need to go past the fantasies of youth, when we might not have realized what choices were available, and we have more insight to the cost of living in an other-created world limited by a picket fence of propriety. The clay gate challenges us to claim our sexuality, our ability to be intimate through our self-knowledge, to speak our own truth. The black and white gate of relationships challenges us not only to work on our relationships with others—lover, children, parents, friends, but to integrate ourselves, light and shadow, recognizing our lovableness and claiming our bliss. The rustic gate gives us a chance at the cauldron of creativity, the right of autonomy within society, to have our own lives and do our own work. The bone gate calls us to speak our own truth as we have learned it. The natural gate, that "lonesome valley," gives us the time to savor who we have become and to prepare for the golden gate, of non-attachment to the physical world, having walked our own path with our own feet in integrity and fullness of spirit.

According to Carter (2004), "When we find our spiritual path, we find a connection to our own essential nature, our own essence. Through that connection, we are

able to see our relationship to everything else" (p. 194). For a person who develops a spiritual path, non-attachment to the physical world is easier to accept than it is for a person who must face "not to be" at death. Those who achieve what J. Erikson calls gerotranscendence, a shift in perspective from materialism and logic to cosmic transcendence, have reviewed their lives and come to peace not only with who and where they are, but also with how they fit into the stream of life as they perceive it. (Verbraak, 2000) In fact, "J. Erikson posits gerotranscendent individuals must revisit all of the previous eight developmental stages in an effort to resolve any remaining unfinished developmental challenges" (as cited in Verbraak, 2000, p. 11). Instead of disappearing in the crematory at 40, like the citizens of Huxley's *Brave New World*, "The gerotranscendent individual typically experiences a redefinition of Self and of relationships to others and a new understanding of fundamental existential questions." ("The Story", 2005). People who keep living keep growing. Some may be walking around dead and breathing, but it is wrong to assume that is the end of life.

Few stories exist about the crone other than as a magical helper or face of evil. Few stories exist that feature an elder woman as a protagonist in myth, fairy tales, or even literature. Women over 50 cease to exist in the literary mind, but women need stories because we are here, and we are not going to disappear conveniently into nursing homes, bridge clubs, and graveyards.

In a patriarchal culture, there is no place in stories for the woman past childbearing except perhaps as a cookie-baking grandmother, a fearsome witch or a feeble object of pity. But with the advent of the 20th century, near-doubling of life expectancy, paired with the sheer numbers of children born between 1946 and 1962, the

world will witness a gray society—one that may be silver and platinum in its ability thrive in the third age, as are many of the mothers of that generation: people over 65 are now one in eight Americans (Infoplease).

My advance into middle age has help me to realize and overcome my developmental wound, which occurred early and affected me more in my public life than in my home life: I was too big. I have issues with trust, shame and doubt because I am a big, round peg in a world of small, square holes. One of my therapists suggested that my primary message at home was "Don't be!" I did not learn how to claim Carter's first intrinsic right for myself except as an outsider, a misfit, a comic.

My mother is average size, but my dad was 6'4" and weighed about 220. As a child and even as an older woman, I find myself at the top edge of what is available in clothing and shoes. I am taller than average for women my age, and until I was 12, I was the tallest, and generally the heaviest student in class. I was very relieved to take three years of band to escape a year of gym in high school. Team sports have never interested me as the last kid chosen. On most airplanes, I am too tall for the seatbacks and too wide for the seatbelts and arm rests. Even a car seatbelt often puts pressur on my hip joint, making walking difficult if I have been driving too long with too tight a seatbelt.

My mother has been after me to lose weight all of my life, even when I was in college and thin—dieting has been an issue between us for half a century. While I am obese now, then I was just big. I felt that I should starve myself into acceptability—and I refused! There literally seemed to be no place that I fit or that fit me. Every social event, every thing that girls seemed to like—such as going shopping—was torture for me. I felt that I was never allowed to be a child.

I was always expected to act older and be more mature and responsible than I was because people often thought I was five or more years older than I was. When I began menstruation at 10, I felt that there was no justice in anyone having to be female; it's hard to be 5'4", weigh 130 lbs., and wear size 10 shoes and a 36C bra when one is in the 4th grade (I was an average adult woman at the age of ten) . At 12, I stopped growing, and the boys at least caught up. By then my self-image had hardened around me as a bright, often brash girl who was unattractive and too weird for normal people. I am just beginning now to break through those self-described limitations.

Baubo reflects what I want to be: a juicy crone, one who has the "the willingness to color outside the lines" (Carter, 2004, p. 194.) She flouts the standard of "nice" to do what must be done to confront and reach Demeter, an act that saves the world from starvation, and calls Demeter to action. I want to be her priestess as I teach people how to plant their dreams and feed themselves from the harvest. I want to be outrageously funny, releasing my rage at previous loss of my intrinsic rights, to call out other women of "a certain age" to their own integrity, authenticity, wisdom, and juiciness. I want to tell the stories, make them up, to show the way through the eight gates and what lies beyond the cups, once they have been tasted. I expect it is a long journey before one gets to the mountains, but full of adventure and mystery, perhaps in the tavern of the Nine of Cups.

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