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The Inner Patriarch

An Invisible Force That Holds Women Back

BY SIDRA STONE



An invisible barrier stands between Hillary Rodham Clinton and the presidency—a barrier that might prove as important as all the political and personal issues that are polarizing our country.

This invisible barrier is something quite different from the glass ceiling that Hillary (and the thousands of women who came before her) has successfully shattered—the glass ceiling of the outer patriarchy. The glass ceiling of the internalized patriarchy remains intact and invisible in both men and women.

Imagine moving out of your parents' home. You now live far away from them, your life is your own, and you are an accomplished, responsible, and respected adult. You are free to do as you wish. But are you? Somewhere deep inside, you still hear their voices, you still know their rules, you still think about their

criticisms and their praise. And this has an effect upon you and your behavior. Whether you try to follow their counsel and gain their approval or you heartily reject it and lead a life that is as different from theirs as you can reasonably manage, you are still reacting to their injunctions.

Maybe you are aware of this internalized voice of your parents and its effect on you, or maybe it is hidden. Either way, it is there. But now it is no longer their voices that you hear but a voice within you that echoes theirs. They have taught you how to get along in the world—their world—as best they could. They were not trying to harm you; they felt a sense of responsibility for your well-being and were trying to protect you from (and prepare you for) the harsh realities of life on this planet.

And so it is with the Inner Patriarch, a voice within women that echoes millennia of patriarchal input. For these millennia, it has shown women how best to survive in a man's world. I've spent the past 30 years examining this internalized version of the patriarchy, and I've been astounded at its power in women (and men too). I call it the Inner Patriarch or the Shadow King (since he rules from the deepest shadows of our psyches). This voice disempowers women from within even though many of the outer barriers to power have been removed and the outer patriarchy no longer has the same power and control.

Since the things that he says are no longer politically correct, women do not want to hear the voice of their own Inner Patriarch. One woman wrote to tell me: "The first time I tried to read your book, I was so upset by the suggestion that I might have an Inner Patriarch 'lurking in the shadows' that I threw your book out of my window!" She went on to tell me that when she finally did read it, she understood much more about herself—she saw her Inner Patriarch as a source of her subservient relationships with men and her arrogant and demeaning behavior toward other women.

After all, women are supposed to be equal to men and to deserve equal treatment. But most women can feel him stirring within whenever they assume major leadership positions. They can feel a vague unease because this invisible Inner Patriarch is convinced that a "real woman" does not want power in the world, that this kind of power is reserved for men. He trivializes whatever they have accomplished and often what other women have accomplished. (This feeling that she is not authentic, not a real woman could be a serious problem for Hillary in her bid for the presidency.)

Several years ago, I spoke with a woman who was extremely successful in business. But

her Inner Patriarch remained completely unimpressed. He explained to me that "she had to go to work. Her husband was disabled in a car accident, and this was a part of her wifely duties. Her own professional success was unimportant. What mattered was the support she gave her husband." When I asked whether he would have felt the same about her meteoric rise if she were a man, he answered (without irony): "Of course not. If she were a man, I would have been very impressed with his spectacular accomplishment."

One way to discover the voice of an Inner Patriarch is to check for a double standard within yourself. Ask yourself questions such as these:

"If I were a man would I feel entitled to take time to rest when I come home from work?"

"If I were a man would I feel entitled to have someone else do this work for me?"

"If I were a man would I feel entitled to my own feelings?"

"If I were a man would I feel the need for a primary relationship?"

"If I were a man would I worry so much about others?"

The Inner Patriarch, mirroring the outer patriarchy, knows that men and women are clearly different and each has a specific role to fulfill in relationship. He has a traditional view of gender roles and is confused by—and quite critical of—any departures from them. He does not think that women are capable of caring for ourselves without the protection and help of a strong man. This often presents a problem for us: we fall in love with a man who is in touch with his feelings, and our Inner Patriarch finds him unmanly!

When we accept the Inner Patriarch's assessments of us, we become weakened. Conversely, when we fight against his views, when we insist that we will never allow a man to help us and that we must do everything alone, we continue to allow our Inner Patriarchs to define our reality and to interfere with our creativity. Either way, we do not have the option to interact comfortably with men as equal and caring human beings.

The Inner Patriarch sees women's sexuality as something to be controlled; he does this by shaming her for having any sexual impulses. Basically, a woman's sexuality is acceptable only if it is in the service of her husband. The Inner Patriarch sees this as a way to protect her from inflaming the uncontrollable sexuality of men. In contrast, a "real man's" sexuality is evidence of his power and is encouraged and admired. If a man behaves inappropriately (as in rape or incest), it is the woman's responsibil-

ity, not his, and she is seen as having brought it upon herself.

The Inner Patriarch sees women as totally responsible for all relationships. It is the woman who keeps the man (or family) healthy and happy. The specific rules vary from culture to culture and are absolutely fascinating to hear. This view creates a particular tension in our relationships with men. When we listen to our Inner Patriarchs, we become daughters to men. We can be compliant or rebellious, but daughters we are. This daughter, in turn, transforms every man that she meets into a father and so subverts her own power. We can never relate to a man as an equal human being, each with our own unique and important contribution to make to the relationship. We can never be true partners.

We women have come a very long way during my 79 years. Our job now that we have faced the outer patriarchs, and in many instances have enlisted their aid, is to face our Inner Patriarchs and to enlist theirs.

Our Inner Patriarchs are being awakened to the fact that we women are born with the necessary power, objectivity, and skills not only to survive but to excel in today's world. They can see what we women can produce both professionally and in the home—and that both are equally important and should be valued as such. They are appreciating the true significance of childbearing and childrearing for the survival of humanity. They see the importance of supportive, loving, respectful relationships for the proper nourishment of all human beings. And as this change in consciousness occurs, men are freed from their own patriarchal expectations. They can embrace their roles as fathers in a way unimaginable to earlier generations and make their own unique contributions to coming generations.

When we are daughters, the men in our lives can only be our fathers. When we avoid men, they cannot be with us at all. When we come to them in the totality of our beings as women, including both our strength and our sensitivity, we are free to partner one another as peers. It is my vision that in this way men and women, as full and equal partners, will be able to consciously cocreate a new culture, one in which the traditionally feminine contributions are equivalent in importance to the traditionally masculine, both men and women can embrace the totality of who they are, and our full human birthright is restored. 🍀

Sidra Levi Stone, PhD, is cocreator of Voice Dialogue and author of The Shadow King: The Invisible Force That Holds Women Back. SidraStone.com

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