
In These Uncertain Times: The Inner Patriarch and Vulnerability

by Sidra Stone Ph.D



As I watch what is happening around the world today, I grow increasingly concerned - particularly about what is happening to women. And that, in turn, affects all of us and the planet itself. There is one aspect of this that I've been studying for decades and I think it's time for me to speak specifically about how women themselves can be collaborating, unknowingly, with the very cultural attitudes that affect them - and those they love - negatively. Often very negatively!

I am under no illusion that mine is the only way to deal with the ever-increasing challenges facing this planet - and each of us individually - in a variety of areas. The societal challenges alone are enormous! Fortunately, there are many who have come forth to help.

There is something that I have observed and worked with over these past thirty (or forty) years. It is the Inner Patriarch. This is a self that has an amazing impact upon women and - thru them - on others (of all genders) in their lives. The recognition of the role of this Inner Patriarch has resonated with women - and men - on every continent and in surprisingly diverse cultures.

It has been easy to observe the outer patriarchy, the legacy of thousands of years. And, there have been some changes in the outer patriarchy: laws have been changed and

women were granted some rights and some amount of legal autonomy and protection.

But there is something that has not changed: the Inner Patriarch who lives inside every woman. He carries the rules and expectations of several millennia of patriarchal domination. He has been passed on by mothers to their daughters - it was a way of teaching them how to live successfully in the outer world of patriarchy.

As conditions on our planet become increasingly challenging, people become more vulnerable and the power of this Inner Patriarch increases. His natural reaction at a time like this is to search for a powerful man who he thinks will rescue us from the confusion and uncertainty that surrounds us.

He is easily drawn to a 'real man', a 'natural leader' who is strong, sure of himself and his own opinions, and unwavering in his resistance to any opposition. This 'real man' has a clear and simple explanation for what is wrong and needs to be righted - whether it is an enemy that needs to be eradicated or a set of behaviors that must be changed.

The Inner Patriarch may well urge us to follow such a leader without question. We - especially women - need to become aware of these urgings and understand where they

come from so that we can navigate the turbulent waters ahead! We need to look beyond this compelling picture of a rescuing, all-powerful, autocratic leader and think clearly about what we might be asked to sacrifice.

The Inner Patriarch is invisible to the naked eye. He lives in the shadows of women's unconscious, which is why I've named him "The Shadow King."

This is a time for women to take up their rightful positions as full partners in the consciousness change that is required to deal with the massive challenges that face our planet and our basic survival as a species. Women are half the world's population and need to assume their authority and responsibility for this survival. But in order to do this successfully, it helps immeasurably to learn about their own Inner Patriarchs who do not feel this way at all.

What does the Inner Patriarch look like?

Judith Brown's painting gives a picture of the dual nature of the relationship between the Shadow King - the Inner Patriarch - and a woman. It shows the Shadow King enfolding a woman who holds the glowing totality of who she is: both her traditionally masculine energies (yang) and her traditionally feminine energies (yin). He is both protective and limiting. As long as she remains within the confines of his cloak, a woman can feel held, safe and protected. But this same cloak is also holding her back, limiting her agency and preventing her from moving beyond his kingdom, his embrace and his laws. Many of these laws truly protect women, but some severely limit women's rights.

What does this Inner Patriarch say?

The basic premise of the Inner Patriarch is: 'Women should be women and men should be men.' Their roles are clearly defined and complementary. But they are not equal - although the role of the woman is recognized as truly indispensable, the man is basically more powerful. In this system the role of the man is more important and he, therefore, is entitled to more authority and power. As the Inner Patriarch explains his views, life is predictable, manageable, and expectations are familiar. This can be very comforting in times of chaos and change.

He supports the traditional patriarchal picture that a woman's place is in the home, responsible for the overall

wellbeing of the family, taking care of the home, the money given to her by her husband, keeping the appropriate accounts, and making sure that her husband and sons are satisfied, successful and well fed. She is responsible for supporting her husband in every way she possibly can, and for ensuring that their relationship is without 'problems'. Her Inner Patriarch sees women as emotional creatures, less rational than men and needing others - particularly men - to lead them and to give them the support they need to help them get along in the world.

The Inner Patriarch emphasizes the traditional patriarchal role of the man as the person who carries the ultimate responsibility for the survival of the entire family in a world that can be difficult. It is he who should be the provider for the entire family, the one to keep them physically safe, to deal with threats and problems, to meet all challenges and to make all the important decisions. He is capable of moving beyond emotions or needs, seeing situations clearly, and dealing with challenges impersonally and competently. Therefore, he is naturally entitled to be the master - to claim the authority that comes with this responsibility.

These clear distinctions between the expectations the Inner Patriarch has of men and of women lead us to something interesting. Men and women need each other - they complete each other. They need relationship. As they follow the injunctions of the Inner Patriarch, they produce offspring that carry forth their lineage. On the other hand, neither man nor woman is expected to develop into a full human being. The woman has had to give up her power and the man, his feelings. In this tradition, each has given up half of our human birthright.

Think of how much richer the world would be if each of us (regardless of gender) could bring the totality of our unique being to full partnering relationships with others. Of course, we are not all the same; we each have our strengths and weaknesses, and our areas of competence and of limited abilities. But each of us is unique and carries our own particular gift. What might happen if we could honor this and not judge ourselves or others according to the expectations and rules created millennia ago for a totally different life in a different world?

How can Voice Dialogue help us to recognize our Inner Patriarch?

Since the Inner Patriarch has different expectations of men and women, this is what we look for. The basic question to

ask of him is:

“If ___ were a man, how would you feel about her behavior in this situation?”

or

“If ___ were a woman. How would you feel about his behavior in this situation?”

For instance, Mary was a competent bookkeeper who had worked intermittently for a few local professional women in order to earn a little money for something extra - like a family vacation. Basically, her job was caring for the home. When her husband was killed in an automobile accident, she assumed his traditional responsibilities as the head of the family. She had done some part-time bookkeeping in the past, but now she studied accounting at the local college, became a licensed CPA (certified public accountant), and eventually set up her own accounting firm. She worked very hard and managed, with great effort, to meet her family’s financial needs while continuing to provide a nurturing home for her two sons.

Her Inner Patriarch shrugged his shoulders and said dismissively, “Well she had to do it. So she did!” But when I asked him, “What if Mary had been a man who had started up his own independent accounting firm?”, her Inner Patriarch had commented (with great enthusiasm) “I would have been very impressed. Starting up your own business takes a great deal of courage, competence, and perseverance and she was the first person in her family to do anything like that.”

I asked her Inner Patriarch how he would have felt if Mary had gone to school, gotten her CPA license, and set up her own accounting business while her husband was still alive and she didn’t ‘have to’. His response was, “I would say that she was power hungry, that this was not what she should be doing. A real woman should not wish to be powerful or to go out in the world. It is just not right. She should be at home so that she can take proper care of the household. Her first job is to be make sure that her husband is happy.”

Yes, it’s time for the Inner Patriarch to catch up with the reality of our present world situation. We can help him to do this. He is ready – but change is not easy for him. He carries with him many generations of tradition. We can show him how things have changed and that we are now capable of helping to deal with this new world.

Women, take back your lives! Don’t allow your Inner Patriarchs to collude with misogynistic, autocratic, fascistic

individuals who will deprive you of your hard-won progress towards equality. He can make his contribution, but we need to be able to act as full human beings as we tackle the new realities that face us all.

Many years ago, I had the following dream. It felt like a blessing for this task.

DREAM OF THE PATRIARCHS

In my dream, I find myself respectfully facing a semi-circle of patriarchs of biblical times. They are obviously men of great importance and responsibility - a responsibility that weighs heavily upon them. They wear long white robes and leather sandals and each has a grey beard. We are all standing.

The patriarchs look at me with sad faces. I have an unspoken question in my heart: “Am I ready to write my book on the Inner Patriarch?”

The patriarch in the center (there seem to be nine of them) speaks for all of them. He looks at me regretfully and says, with tears in his eyes: “We didn’t mean it to turn out the way that it did.” He lets me know that it is time to begin to write, that my deep ambivalence about the outer patriarchy has been worked through. They know I will be fair to them - that I understand that they had good intentions and honor them for what they have brought to the world - and they want me to write the book to correct some of the problems that have arisen during the past millennia. I am deeply touched. I accept the task, and feel totally supported by them. And as I feel their commitment to this venture, I know that I can now begin to write my book on the Inner Patriarch.

The following morning, I began to write “The Shadow King”.