

A Body Rejected, A Body Regained

Julie Tara

I sit in a darkened theatre, softly cloaked with others in hushed anticipation. In silence the curtain slowly rises and we see upon the barely lit stage a row of mannequins, semi-naked; all the same, perfect, shining forms – of plastic. Large, pink, rounded breasts stare out to meet our gaze. Each one identical to the next and the next. Each staring blindly. A rustle of awkwardness moves through the audience. What is this? What's going on? And then, one by one, somber and silent, each figure turns to reveal a human form. We witness, awestruck, candles held in utmost stillness, casting their flickering light upon the nakedness of woman. Their faces in darkness, our eyes are called to look upon a sea of breasts – there is nowhere to shift our gaze. We are transfixed in time and space.

Focussed on breasts of the young, the old, the rounded, pointed, full, petite, level and uneven; and there, at the end of the line, one alone, with a poignant scar to mark the ghost of its partner. Light and shadow play upon the rich differences of these symbols of identity we hold so dear and wrestle with so deeply. There is no sound or movement – all is still – and the sacredness of the moment wraps itself around us all in a cocoon of the most profound truth.

In today's world, perhaps more than at any other time, the shadow side of our relationship to our breasts has come to

the fore. Though we hopefully still experience the exquisite joys of our breasts in many ways, we are quietly plagued with fears of the dreaded disease, breast cancer. We are witnessing it claiming younger and younger lives all around us.

The facts weigh heavy, and it becomes steadily more difficult to turn a blind eye. It's scary alright, the possibility of our gentle breasts becoming our fiercest enemy, fighting us to the very death. Imagining the body being divided into two such polarized camps is a schizophrenic way of thinking, and yet we think it. It is the opposite of all we know as integrity, integration, and wholeness. Yet who does not secretly wonder, as they shower in the morning, if this soft, sacred part of our bodies will not one day betray us in the most merciless fashion?

Earth Mother

It is not hard to see the parallel between a diseased breast or the scars of mastectomies emblazoned across our feminine forms and our diseased Earth Mother, who has been ruthlessly cut for so many years. She cries out in pain at the betrayal of her loved ones, just as we do. She bleeds profusely each time a new incision is made, just as we do. We are mirror images for each other and the quest for health and wholeness runs as full and deep as Her rivers and wells, as the

blood in our veins.

We know we must accept our collective responsibility with committed hands and courageous hearts. For Life is a delicate and precious wonder. It demands from us the utmost awareness of balance and harmony within and without the Self. It is a mystery that calls us to wakefulness in whatever manner we need.

Not far behind this primary fear of breast cancer, another ominous shadow lurks in our minds and hearts – the dark side of our self image. We all smile grimly over that one because we know it so well. It too, can feel like a life/death issue, though more within our mental and emotional domains than in the physical. No less awesome territory to move within however! I mean, how many women friends do you know who are totally fulfilled and joyful in their relationship to their breasts? And how many struggle with their internal images of what is supposed to be, versus what is?

Social Pressures

Of course, we know that the social pressures only help to deepen our self doubt and self disdain. Fashion magazines, television, and movies – all strive to tilt our collective perspective of what a beautiful (i.e., desirable) woman should look like. It's a pretty stilted version, with no creative room for the myriad shapes and sizes possible in the feminine form. Yet we become so caught up in it ourselves (especially when we are in our wildly impressionable teens and twenties), that even when there are serious dangers inherent in changing our image (e.g., silicone breast implants), we remain confused. The attraction of utilizing shape shifting methods in order to be more "acceptable" is so strong that it overwhelms our deeper respect for our bodies' integrity and our natural desire for health and wholeness.

I remember how, at the tender age of twelve and thirteen, I watched with fascination and wide-eyed anticipation as my breasts began to show signs of growth and change – the unexpected sensitivity, occasional pain and fear. It was all an exciting and very natural adventure, one I happily accepted.

It wasn't until around age sixteen that I began to change my mind about my body, and most particularly about my

breasts. By then I was in full training at a prestigious ballet school – a place where girls are supposed to remain girls and not become young women. Where flat chests are “the look,” the “right” way to be. In ballet, breasts are just not the thing, they get in the way, and are inconvenient, cumbersome even. This was never said in so many words, but it was known; it was in the unsaid part of our training.

Growing Dismay

So here I was, rapidly transforming into a young woman of perfectly normal proportions – much to my growing dismay. I began wearing big baggy sweatshirts and hunching my shoulders in an attempt to hide my shame. By age seventeen, I was distraught. Every day I was in front of mirrors for hours on end, being trained to find the faults in my work and fix them. In ballet that translates to finding the faults in your body and fixing them. Over time, I matured into a fine dancer, but the hate I felt towards my breasts for their mere existence burned in me like a fierce flame.

That's when I decided to fix the problem. It didn't take long to find a breast reduction surgeon. He thought I was crazy, because my breasts were not oversized, except to me. He told me I didn't need surgery; he told me I'd have scars and no nipple sensation; he told me I'd never be able to nurse my children. To every objection he stated I simply shook my head and said “I don't care.” Then I began to cry heavily, telling him it was imperative I have the surgery, else my career would be jeopardized. It was a lie and I knew it, but I also knew he wouldn't go through with the operation unless I convinced him. I could no longer see with the eyes of truth but only through the fog of delusion. With great reluctance and a heavy heart he agreed. I was elated. I booked the hospital bed for two weeks hence.

Mother Knows Best

I informed my family and boyfriend coolly of what I was doing. My boyfriend (also a dancer) whom I was living with, simply shrugged and said, “Whatever makes you happy.” That looked like support to me and we spoke no more about it. A few days later, however, my mother called. She was extreme-

ly upset by my decision and had decided to take a stand against me (or so I thought) by refusing to sign the parental consent form. I remember a lot of shouting back and forth – her words, “I will not allow your body to be butchered!” And mine, “How dare you try to stop me. On my eighteenth birthday I will be in that hospital, just you wait and see!” How furious I was with her for thwarting my desires!

By the time I was eighteen I had changed my mind. Who knows exactly how or why, but during that one year of maturation something shifted within and I began to come to terms with my body and even to enjoy it. I became a professional dancer and miraculously my breasts were no longer a problem for me. My perception had changed. I realized then that my mother's powerful determination had been the greatest act of love for me, born out of honoring the inherent beauty and harmony of my body. As my mother, she knew my truth in a way I could not witness at that time.

Songs of Wisdom

A few years later I began to reestablish my innate connection with Mother Earth, learning how to listen to Her songs of wisdom. I began by changing the food I ate, to more fully honor the fruits of her womb. I meditated and danced upon Her. Walked and sang with Her. Listened to Her pain, Her joys – and became ever more sensitive to Her rhythms and cycles.

The sweet joy and grace of being pregnant, bearing and nursing three children profoundly deepened my sense of self as a blossoming reflection of the Great Mother. The divine miracle of the creativity of my body was awe inspiring to me. The rich fertile soil of my womb was now a nourishing chalice to hold new life. My belly became a round replica of the globe Herself. And after birth my breasts took on that fullness, sweet milk flowing from them like magic waters from an eternal spring. Offering all for the child in unconditional love and abundance. The realization that I might have never experienced this is something I do not take lightly. I know I came a hair's breadth away from self-mutilation – all in the name of “ambition, fitting in, being right, being beautiful.” All

in the name of a devastated self image.

Time for Reunion

It is only when we are split from the truth of who we are, of the true nature of our beingness, that we could even imagine the possibility, let alone necessity, of tampering with our Goddess given bodies. What does it say about our culture that we are so driven to pervert our form, most particularly our breasts? We have become so removed from Nature, from Truth. I say it is time we remember who we really are. It is time for reunion. When we align with our Earth's beauty, we see our own beauty. When we witness the Goddess gloriously present in all Nature, we move and breathe and live in Her Being. We become Her and She becomes us. The split is healed at last. And this is a most beautiful and sacred dance. □

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