

Out of Africa – brooding on potential

It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.

When I was a child I raised chickens in the backyard. There were the good layers like the rangy, white leghorns, the big round Rhode Island Reds, the shiny black Australorps, and a mean old rooster who ruled his kingdom ferociously, flying at me and my sister with long ripping spurs if we dared enter his domain. We also had bantams and one of them was a sweet little red hen that was perpetually broody and spent her entire life sitting on eggs. She was such a good little mother that we would take eggs from the bigger hens and put them under her to hatch them.

She would devotedly sit the prerequisite twenty-one days on the eggs until the little chicks started pecking their way out into the world. Inevitably all the little chicks would hatch except for one egg. The little hen would keep sitting on the one last egg in the hopes that it too would hatch. If we tried to take it from her, recognizing that it was rotten, she would peck at our hands. In the meantime all the little chicks needed her to get off the nest and teach them to scratch in the dirt and find food. She was clearly distressed at this point, hearing the call of the chicks to be protected and raised by her and her instinctive need to hatch the last egg. Eventually my mother would sneak into the hen house at night when she was sleeping and take the last rotten egg from her. I suspect the little red hen would have eventually given up by herself but in the meantime her continued sitting was to the detriment of her other motherly tasks of rearing her chicks.

This little hen embodied the archetypal feminine energy that is passive, round, encircling, brooding, providing the optimum conditions of warmth and moisture for life to come into being, protective, holding, drawing near, clucking and fretting if the chicks go too far afield. This energy was so strong and imbalanced in her, however, that it would eventually threaten life – the life of the hatched chicks because she kept brooding on potential instead of recognizing reality and life.

There is a time for masculine energy, that discards, moves to action and gets on with things. Feminine energy that holds on too long becomes destructive and masculine energy that lets go too quickly is destructive. We have to know in life when to hope and hold on and when to give up hope and make decisions. The moment of decision making is difficult to discern. For a chicken hatching eggs it seems so easy. After 22 days, give up hope, stop brooding on potential, throw out the rotten egg. If only it was so easy for humans in assessing the complexity of careers, relationships and the potential in any given situation. Often, only in retrospect we can see when the 22 days were up, so to speak, and how we kept sitting on the nest.

As I look back on my own life I know that my tendency has been always to brood too long, to give not only second chances but third and tenth chances, to stay with something when it is clear that nothing is changing, growing or giving life to me. It has been hard to learn to make the decision to get up and move, to let go, to stop hoping and imagining what could be and deal with what is. And yet when I have finally made the decision to move on, it has always resulted in more life, and more growth.

When have you held on too long - past the time that your own intuition and soul told you it was time to let go? When have you had a hard time giving up hope? When have you held on to hope doggedly? What beliefs and ideals do you hold that prevent you from seeing the benefit of action, decisions and discarding the old? Have you stayed with relationships that are no longer life giving and promote growth and challenge, but take life from you and hold you back? What fantasies prevent you from seeing reality?