

Father of the Bright

One of the first realizations my wife and I had when our new baby Emily was born, shortly after “Oh my God! There’s no owner’s manual for this thing!” was that she was a complete, perfect being. You could look down at her lying helpless on the bed and just see she was an already developed soul come to visit our planet, who would take a little while to get the hang of operating her mobile systems (called the body) and in the meantime would need some care and protection. We never for a moment thought she was ours to own, nor did we suffer from the delusion that she was an unformed lump of clay that had to be pounded into shape or else she would remain a lump for the rest of her days. We didn’t imagine an angry God looking down upon her as a sinner and evil incarnate awaiting any certain type of religious instruction. So much beauty radiated from that tiny being! It was breathtaking. And radiate is the right word. Dim your eyes slightly and you were bathed in a bright, almost blinding light.

There is nothing unique in such brilliance. Our second child, Harmony, shone just as brightly, and if anything, astonished us even more. All healthy babies shine from within, as any midwife will tell you. That’s why they love so much to do the work they do.

And human beings being what we are, after awhile Deb and I stopped being dazzled by the light and focused on the mundane requirements of feeding, washing and bombarding Emily with stimuli. We were encouraged in our joyful tasks by looks so full of love they nearly bowled us over. We could almost forget we were merely temporary caretakers of this dynamo.

Another human failing is to imagine that the universal love forming the ocean in which we swim is somehow personalized, that we deserve it or don’t, or that it’s doled out in parsimonious increments. We begin to fear it resides in specific people or places, and that it’s something that can be lost when we are separated from those people or places. It’s the flip side of the coin of pounding the clay into shape, and only a short step away from imagining we are

high and dry and stranded on a desert island of lovelessness. It makes us cling where we should embrace, and later struggle with letting go of things that were never ours to begin with.

One of the challenges of raising a child is to continually step back and let go of your current level of caretaking. Their psyches are just like an invisible flowering bush. When they first sprout or are transplanted as seedlings via adoption they take a lot of hovering over: you have to feed and water them and cultivate around them so the weeds don't choke them out. As they become established they need less and less tending; their branches thrust out to guard a little space around their base so they can control weeds on their own, and they develop broad roots that provide them the resiliency to bide their time through dry periods and flourish when conditions permit.

Parents are prone to getting stuck in their memories, so they sometimes lean in too close to examine the little sprout and don't notice they're breaking some tender branches. But children experience it as a violation of their personal space and a challenge to their integrity. Some religions go as far as to teach the importance of destroying or pruning back this integrity, to provide meek followers for their dictates. Done well this might be okay, but unfortunately the pruning is often done blindly and haphazardly. This is nothing more or less than child abuse. It demonstrates a lack of trust in the inner light which lovingly guides each being to develop in the most harmonious fashion. Parents may cut off the most promising new growth, impelled by current fads or implanted fears grafted onto their innate common sense. They wind up with topiary rather than the full natural potential the bush could express.

For humans the path to adulthood is very long. In the early period in the womb the brain reprises the evolution of sentient life at a rate estimated as the equivalent of one hundred years of evolution each second. The rate stays high after birth for a couple

of spectacular years (63,072,000 seconds or 6.3 billion more years of mental evolution at the old rate, but of course it does slow down some), and then continues with fits and starts for the rest of the time we are the owner-operators of a functioning brain.

Observing this blooming of the bush of humanity from a safe but nurturing distance is an honor and a delight. But unlike bushes, humans can move around and discover new fields of beauty to shine in and be shined on. The other day Emily walked down the marriage aisle, flanked by her old caretakers, known locally as her mom and dad. As they peeled off to their seats, relinquishing the last vestige of premarital caretaking, she stood radiantly next to a fellow traveler, soon to be called her husband, struggling to choke back his own inner sun as sons are trained to do in these parts. The outer sun beamed down on them both together while a crowd of radiant beings looked on, swept up in overwhelming surges of awareness that washed the dryness out of many an eye.

All through the long afternoon and evening people acknowledged the supreme benignity of the loving light in which we all basked. As they approached me they couldn't resist calling me by the gently mocking moniker, "Father of the Bright." Except they mispronounced it "Father of the Bride." Probably they called my wife "Mother of the Bright," but we were seldom in the same place at the same time, so I don't know. In any case the latter is the better-known cliché. I must've heard it a dozen times or more, spoken under the breath or with a touch of awe: "Oh! Father of the Bright!" All of us knew the Bright is not fathered or mothered by anything, but is the father and mother to us all. No act of worship or prayer or service brings it into existence. It needs no one to care for it, but it embraces us and nourishes us all without reservation, just as the star named Sun shines equally on everyone.

Yet looking once more on the radiant beauty of my daughter and son-in-law, I knew they were right. Certainly about the Bright, and I had to humbly admit that whatever minor character a father

might be, I was one of those too. For one spectacular day I wore
the joyful crown of the Father of the Bright.
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