

by Hilary Valentine

[Hilary Valentine and Seed recently taught an Iron Pentacle class for the Reclaiming community. In these two articles, they share their thoughts and experiences.]

The Iron Pentacle is a meditation tool from the Feri tradition. The Pentacle stands on its own, and is a visual symbol, or an experience of energy and integrity in our star-shaped bodies.

The following thoughts are not from Feri tradition, but rather some of my own insights after years of working with and teaching the Iron Pentacle.

The points of the Iron Pentacle are sex, self, passion, pride and power. These are qualities, or abilities, or states that occur quite naturally in a human being, or any other animal, when it is healthy. However our culture, like many other cultures worldwide, trains its members to control or limit these qualities in order to

reduce conflict. Some cultures, for example, the New England Yankee Christian culture I come from, go so far as to label these qualities sins. The opposite qualities, such as virginity,

The Iron

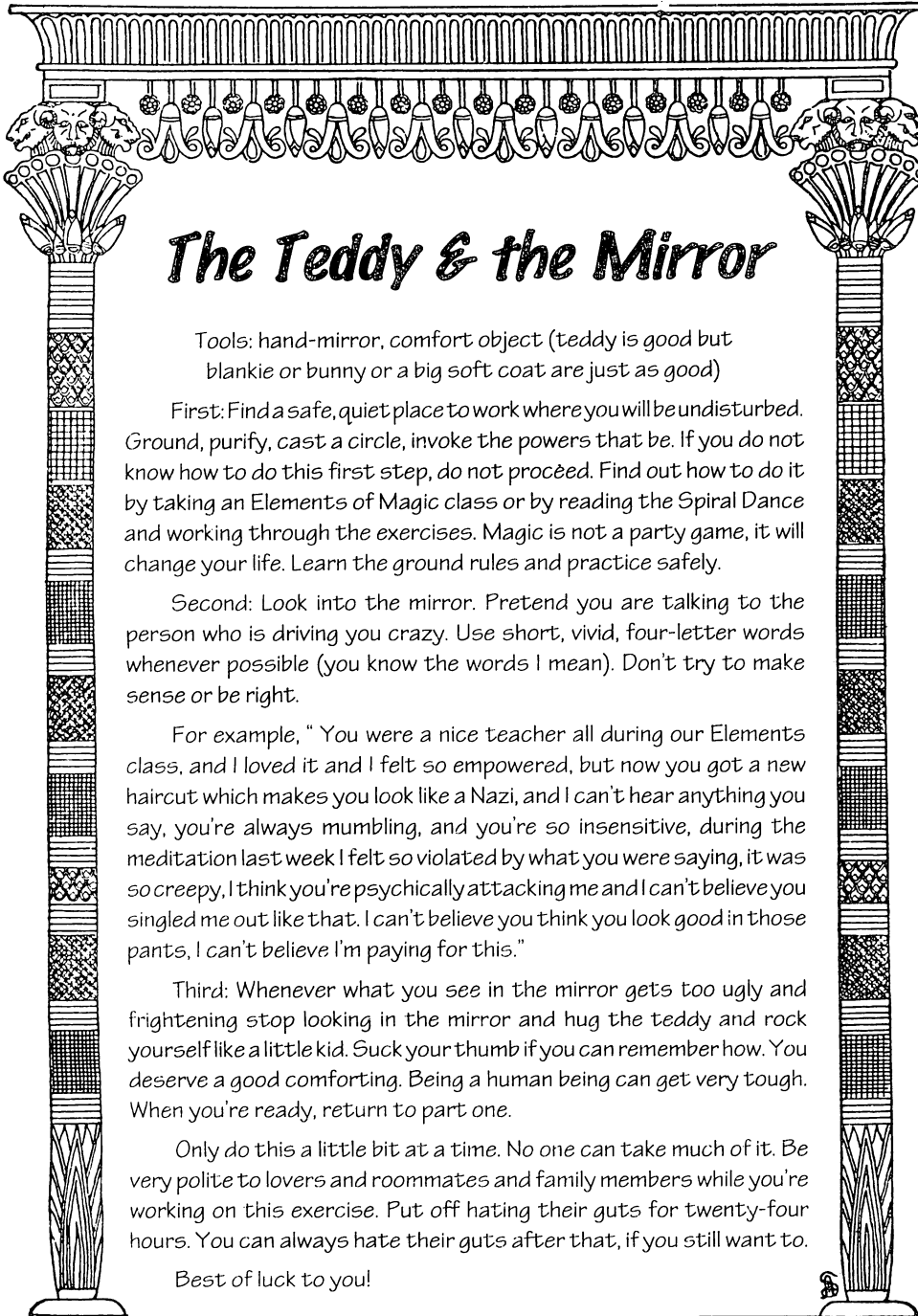
humility, and selflessness are highly prized.

My own opinion is that the qualities of the Iron Pentacle, if fully integrated into a woman or man, would make conflict inevitable between that person and a community based on power-over, whether that community was a patriarchal family, a "job," a religious community based on priests whose powers are seen as different or greater than the community members, or a class society. When children experience bursts of growth and health, they also experience bursts of conflict with those around them, especially parents, teachers, nuns, and police. (They also need to eat lots of foods containing iron.)

The qualities of the Iron Pentacle are simply not desirable in slaves.

I have often wondered about the "coincidence" of the story-language about fairies not being able to bear the touch of iron, and the Iron pentacle of the Feri tradition. If in fact the Feri tradition goes back to neolithic and bronze age peoples of the Celtic lands, this coincidence suddenly makes perfect sense. These peoples would historically have been defeated by invading peoples armed with iron weapons, against which flint or bronze weapons would have been virtually useless. The parallels between the history of the Native European nature people and the Native American nature people becomes painfully clear. Some of the defeated peoples were enslaved, others literally melted away into the mountains and mists, "under the green hill." Those that melted away "could not bear the touch of Iron." Those that were enslaved kept the Iron Pentacle in their secret hearts, and passed the meditation on to their

continued on page 43



The Teddy & the Mirror

Tools: hand-mirror, comfort object (teddy is good but blankie or bunny or a big soft coat are just as good)

First: Find a safe, quiet place to work where you will be undisturbed. Ground, purify, cast a circle, invoke the powers that be. If you do not know how to do this first step, do not proceed. Find out how to do it by taking an Elements of Magic class or by reading the Spiral Dance and working through the exercises. Magic is not a party game, it will change your life. Learn the ground rules and practice safely.

Second: Look into the mirror. Pretend you are talking to the person who is driving you crazy. Use short, vivid, four-letter words whenever possible (you know the words I mean). Don't try to make sense or be right.

For example, "You were a nice teacher all during our Elements class, and I loved it and I felt so empowered, but now you got a new haircut which makes you look like a Nazi, and I can't hear anything you say, you're always mumbling, and you're so insensitive, during the meditation last week I felt so violated by what you were saying, it was so creepy, I think you're psychically attacking me and I can't believe you singled me out like that. I can't believe you think you look good in those pants, I can't believe I'm paying for this."

Third: Whenever what you see in the mirror gets too ugly and frightening stop looking in the mirror and hug the teddy and rock yourself like a little kid. Suck your thumb if you can remember how. You deserve a good comforting. Being a human being can get very tough. When you're ready, return to part one.

Only do this a little bit at a time. No one can take much of it. Be very polite to lovers and roommates and family members while you're working on this exercise. Put off hating their guts for twenty-four hours. You can always hate their guts after that, if you still want to.

Best of luck to you!

Iron Pentacle-Hilary

continued from page 6

children, so the qualities of a free and healthy people, living in balance with nature and each other, would not be wholly forgotten. Along with the meditation they also passed the stories of their old religion, now disguised as fireside tales for children, or fairy stories.

Now back to the question of teaching the Iron Pentacle to women and men today.

For most of us as children, the qualities of the Iron Pentacle were opposed and punished long before we learned to talk in this lifetime. Over many lifetimes these qualities have been suppressed on battlefields, executioners' scaffolds, in torture chambers, with rape, seizing of food and lands, seizing of children as slaves, whores and soldiers. Every atrocity of the past, every trauma of the present, rises up to say, "You do not dare."

Some students have told me that just the words, "sex, self, passion, pride, and power" were so scary that they didn't want to take the class. Just naming the points and asking a few questions about the qualities can bring up tremendous psychic conflicts and fears.

When the healthy psyche is confronted with a conflict too threatening, it "projects" some of the conflicting qualities out into the world, onto others. Most of us have experienced this at some time or other. If I feel conflict because I'm worried that I'm not making enough money, very likely the first clue will be that I blame my lover or best friend for "judging me based on money." This may lead straight to heartbreak, because I just can't admit to myself that the conflict is my own. Then I would have to (1) do something about making more money, or (2) admit and accept that I couldn't make more money, even though I want to, or (3) confront the self-hating voice with a decision that making more money is just not me, and I'm fine the way I am. My wise and tricky psyche may not want to face any of those options, and by putting the unpleasantness on someone else, old Psyche can at least buy herself some time.

Now getting together a group of Reclaiming students and teachers to work on the Iron Pentacle tends to release these forces on the level of a tropical storm. Many Reclaiming teachers would probably agree that their very worst experiences as teachers came in Iron Pentacle classes. Both students and teachers, faced with the scary conflicts raised by the Iron Pentacle often begin to see each other as enemies.

When I teach Iron Pentacle now, I start the first night by explaining everything that I've just explained in this article. Then I demonstrate the best magical technique I have discovered for dealing with conflict that has red, rusty stains all over it. This is the teddy and mirror technique, which works like magic on projection. [see page 6.]

Consensus

continued from page 41

eye to the whole and an ear to the ground, as well as holding the direction of the discussion at hand. We consulted often about what we thought was going on, shifting our course or tightening or loosening the focus of the discussion as we felt the group needs warranted. I try not to be too "process bound," that is following a formula, but rather I try to sense the energy as it's happening. After much wrangling, people broke into groups and talked about the principles that brought each of us to witchcamp and to this meeting. It was a free form discussion, the only request was that folks make notes about what was being said so that we all might hear a synopsis of each group's discussion.

When we reported back to the whole group, the beauty of people's reasons for being there, and the amount of unity that was expressed became the ground upon which our work together could stand. We had worked through our questions and concerns and had become a decision making body with a process (consensus) and palpable reasons for being together.

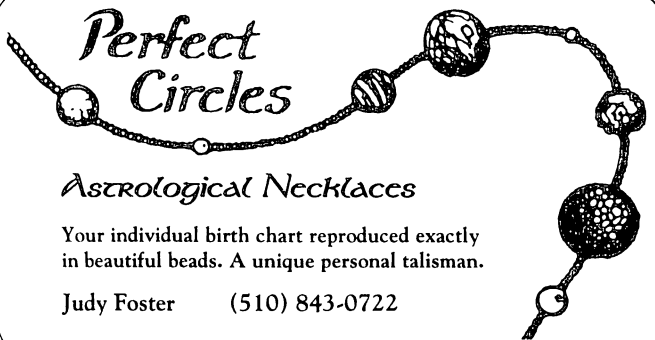
Personally, I needed to stop the action and let the beauty of our unity sink in to me. I asked for a moment of silence. We all just breathed in the sweetness of our bonding.

Then, we listened as some of our elders told us our shared herstory and history: how the camps came into being, how the camps grew, how the San Francisco collective came to be called Reclaiming and other tidbits.

On the second day...

To be continued!!! — Part II will appear in the Fall issue.

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by Seed

In preparation for a recent Iron Pentacle class, I looked up the five points of the Iron Pentacle (Sex, Pride, Self,

Pentacle

Power, Passion) in some word origin reference books. Here are some musings that came out of that research.

Sex

There seems to be disagreement among linguists about the origin of the word SEX. Given the general cultural paralysis on all things sexual, it isn't surprising that the origins of this word have become murky. Some, but not all, feel that the word comes from the Latin word "sectare," which means to divide or to cut. Other words in this family are "section," "bisect," "intersect."

So, what's the link? A division between males and females? A reference to the female sex organ? Who knows?

What resonates for me is the myth of the Goddess, who saw her own reflection in the dark mirror of space, fell in love with herself, and made love so beautifully that she gave birth to all the bright spirits of the universe.

Perhaps the word SEX names the split between us that we yearn to close when we are drawn together.

Pride

The word PRIDE traces back to the Old English word "pryde" and the Old French word "prud." Many old meanings seem to focus on loyalty, usefulness and valour. But the ancient meaning that stood out for me was "standing forward." For me, this is a visceral meaning; to stand forward in one's life, to inhabit one's life without apology. Many of us in this culture, especially women, are trained to stand back, to defer, to collapse. It's good to practice standing forward.

Other related words are the "prow" of a ship, and "prowess." Another word

in this family is "prude." This word, like so many descriptions of women, has become a pejorative. We can reclaim it as a description of a proud woman, a woman who stands forward. A woman who will not play along, will not allow her sexuality to be defined by others.

Here is a quote from Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland, who as a teenager was active in the civil rights movement in Mississippi. She is describing the older women in her community who marched with her in the demonstrations.

"It was so beautiful to see people like Miss Lulabelle Johnson and Miss McGee. They would be walkin' with pride. And their titties would be stickin' out a whole long way in front of them, almost that you could see their titties a block before you see them. But they'd be walkin' with such pride, and that they'd be marchin', and I remember myself trying to walk with that heavy step that they used. Look like the earth would catch their feet and hold them."

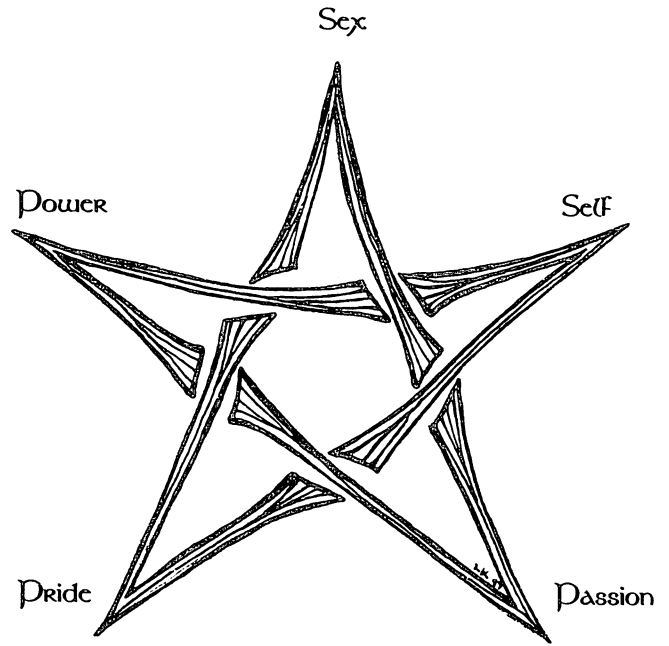
— From "Freedom on My Mind," *The American Experience Series*, PBS TV

Self

The word SELF is an ancient, prehistoric word, shared by many languages. Usually, in looking up a word's origin, there are references to older words, and many shifting meanings through time. But the word "self" stands alone, mysterious and simple.

Here are some of its forms:

- selb Old Irish, Old High German
- sealbh Gaelic
- sialfr Old Norse
- silba Gothic



- zelve Medieval Dutch
- seolf Old English
- sylf Old English
- self Old Frisian, Old Saxon, Old English

Aren't they beautiful? Probably, the "sylphs," the fairies of air, were named from this lovely group of words.

One reference noted, "the word "selfish" was coined in the early 1640s by the Presbyterians." Not surprising.

Power

The word POWER has its origins in the Latin verbs "potere" and "posse" and the French verb "pouvoir," which mean "to be able." Some other words in the same family are; potent, possible, potential. It's interesting to think of the word "power" as a verb rather than a noun. To translate it as "I can," not a thing, but as a state of potency.

Drawing an invoking Iron Pentacle, the energy flows from self into power. When we invoke power and then try to "have" it or "be" it, the energy has a tendency to back up. In effect, it moves in a devoking direction, flowing from power back into self.

Power retained, like stagnant water, becomes toxic. An important discipline is to let it go, to let it dissipate. This is very different from "giving away our power," which as women in this culture

continued on page 42

El Salvador

continued from page 5

to train those same qualities on the problems of his own country, and make El Salvador great.

Do we owe him that chance? I think we do. My commitment to the Goddess tradition leads me to know that we are all interconnected, that Carlos' despair is not separate from my own sense of well being. My political understanding tells me that Carlos has already worked to enrich us. Maybe I don't own a maquila, or even own stock in corporations that run them. But have I not profited by buying cheap clothing and inexpensive electronics, without considering where they were made or the conditions of life of those who produced them?

Carlos is 21 years old.

But now Marta is making us all get up and dance. That's the cornerstone of her organizing technique: first we dance, then we work and eat and play, and later we can come together in ceremony feeling as if we'd known each other all our lives.

So a Macarena line snakes around the pyramids to the blaring tones of rock music from a boom box, and later, in the grand plaza, Hermano Daniel sounds the conch shell, the caracole, to the four directions. Ancient spirits, long asleep, sit up and take notice at the familiar sound. I offer Waters of the World, and Joy invokes the elements. Marta asks us to visualize a fire in the center, and in four groups people come forward and warm their hands around invisible flames. Then we dance the spiral, in the center of the grand plaza, chanting "Ella cambia todo lo que toca, y todo lo que toca cambia"—"she changes everything she touches, and everything she touches changes;" and "Si, se puede," "Yes, it's possible, yes we can,"—the slogan of the people of Tepoztlan in Mexico in their ecological struggle.

"Si, se puede..." Yes, I believe it is possible to create a world in which there is room for Carlos' intelligence and energy to improve his life, in which people can grow food for their own families to eat and tiny houses be surrounded by gardens, in which we can learn to support what is best in one another and bridge our barriers by dancing. The obstacles, and the forces ranged against us are great, but so are the gifts we can offer each other.

If we have gifted Marta and the people we've met with some of our tools of magic, they have equally gifted us with the vision of what can be accomplished through love.

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Iron Pentacle-Seed

continued from page 7

we are trained to do from birth. To give away one's power is to block it, to try to stop its natural flow out of self and into passion.

The aftermath of power is worth talking about. Especially for women, channelling power can be a risky business. When I began priestessing, it seemed that often a few days after a powerful ritual I would find myself right smack dab in the Toxic Pit of Shame. My reaction would be to hide out and hope it passed. It eventually occurred to me to ask my mentor, Hilary (bless her bones), about this syndrome. She said:

"That's the recoil. It's like the kick when you shoot a rifle, when it slams back into your shoulder."

There's nothing more taboo for a woman than reclaiming her power. There are generations and generations of inherited, unspoken warnings echoing in our ears when we do this work, going back all the way to the Burning Times. It's natural for those voices to sometimes rise up after the energy dissipates.

I've come to expect the recoil, and even to allow myself some time to feel shaky after a huge magical working."

Passion

The word "passion" comes from the Latin words "pati" and "passio," which mean "to suffer" or "to endure." Until the 16th century, the word meant "pain." Eventually, it came to mean "strength of feeling," emotional and sexual.

I like to think of the original meaning of the word "passion." Coming from our power puts us in a territory that we can't control. The full range of emotion is our reward, vivid and rich. The Goddess is a gifted surgeon, but not often much of an anesthesiologist. It's good to remember that pain is part of the territory.

Some other words in the same family are; patient, passive, compassion, sympathy, pathetic, compatible. Originally, the word "patient" meant "capable of suffering." The word "passive" meant "susceptible to suffering." Food for thought.

References:

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