

Wonder Learns Women's Ways

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Once upon a time, not too long ago and not too far away, a two-braided, somewhat grey, MetisWoman sits rocking in her rocking chair, shaving red willow for her Pipe, wondering to herself. This is nothing new. She always wonders about a lot of things. She wonders so much, she is named WonderWoman, maybe jokingly, maybe not, by a MedicineMan.

Lately she's been wondering about roles of Aboriginal Women and Sacred Traditional Ways. Not one to sit idle and wonder, she calls a Circle with other Women and wonders aloud: "Who am I as an Aboriginal Woman? Some say we are Transmitters of Culture. Keepers of the Faith. Birthers of the Nation. Strength of our Communities." She speaks to open Circle. "Some raise us up on pedestals. Voices honor us as Mothers. Givers of Life. Yet, Traditional "rules" seem to surround us. Stop us from participating at Times and in Ways we might like to. I wonder what to think, what to do sometimes; do you?"

"Yeah" says Ruby "Where is your dress?" 'Sit legs bent to side.' They scold me when I am bold enough to wear pants. I froze my poor sore knees enough years wearin' dresses in Residential School in 40 below icy cold Winter" she cries. "I want people to accept me for who I am inside. Not worry about what I'm wearing." She wipes Tears from her blackbrown eyes as she passes StoryStone.

After a few moments silence. Turning StoryStone over and over again. Magenta says, "it's confusing. Whenever I ask Why? No answer is supplied. Reason is lost in 'the way it is done here.'" She and a few others laugh at her play on words. "Do they remember why, I wonder?" She asks as she leans over, long black graying hair falling across her face, to pass Stone.

Ravensong, young and full of zesty new age questions, speaks next. "One OldWoman I went to see one time has a SweatLodge. But, she won't

let Women come in. She tells Women they are not supposed to Sweat. I really wonder about that."

Wonder wonders, "do they mean to take our power? Cut us off from the source? Cut our ties to our Mother Earth?"

"What really hurts," Bluebell says, when Stone comes to her, "is that I have heard with my own ears many well known and well-respected Elders preach 'Women on their Moon stay outside Circle. You are Not welcome. You can Not participate in Ceremony'" she says in a strong deep tone. "I've heard different ones say different things are a problem, but that seems to be generally true for many MedicineMen. Stay away on your Moon! And even some MedicineWomen too."

Rosie takes a deep breath, clears her throat, and continues Bluebell's topic when it is her turn. "I've heard, it's dangerous to touch a Pipe, it could break or get sick. And don't cook food for a Feast it could make people sick, you know. It doesn't give me very good feelings either. They say Women on their Time are powerful. And it is good. But if being on my Time is good, than why does it make people sick? I wonder about that a lot of times myself before now." Rosie's pink cheeks are flaming red. She drops her head down for a moment, long straight brown hair falling forward. She sighs as she passes Stone.

"Some say don't gather Herbs, or use certain Medicines, like SweetGrass. Or if you step over ceremonial objects, they will lose their healing power," adds Amber all in a rush. "I never could get it either." She quickly hands Stone on. Obviously uncomfortable.

Leopolda, an older woman from the Rez, holds Stone for a while. Then passes it on. "I'm here to listen tonight." She speaks quietly.

Blanche, her sister, shakes her head. Her short clipped gray hair lays smooth. "I have been told by my Kookhom. It is dangerous for a MedicineMan to eat food prepared by

MoonWomen. He can't sleep with his wife on her MoonTime. Or allow a Woman on her Time to touch any Sacred. This is what they have taught me. I believe them. I would never go against their Teachings." She bows her head sadly, holding her hands clasped stiffly in her lap.

Wonder wonders to herself. "What is at the root of these Teachings? Is it Tradition? Who's Tradition? Why teach our Women shame? To feel bad about our MoonTime? To distrust, dislike, or hide our own bodies? Our Womanness?"

A wise OldOne speaks last. "I spent way too many years with Nuns. Seen bloody panties on my sisters' heads. 'Shame. Shame. Shame on you.' They would say pointing them skinny white fingers at us. I was made to stand in front of a whole school. Boys too! Imagine. In front of a whole school wrap in nothing but a bloody sheet when I got my Time. Shame on me. With no breakfast or nothing. Not that breakfast was ever much more than cold porridge. Not even milk or sugar. We learn to be happy for it though." She says, her voice trailing off into a few moments silence as she remembers that terrible, terrible time.

Soon she continues. "Christian hatred of our Moon, our Women is too deep and dark in my memory to be ignore. I won't say more tonight. Except, one thing. I had to suffer a lot to remember. What my Kookhom taught. Long time ago. If what you are bein' told doesn't help you feel good about yourself, you are right to question it. Pray about it."

Wonder, not one to wonder long, decides right away. "I will fast for Teachings." She tells OldOne as they journey home together after Circle. Light snow falling, catching in ancient maples, glistening flakes like IceFairies, visible in Moonlight. "This will be last of the Season" says OldOne, as she points her chinlips towards snow around them. "I'm more than ready for Spring. I wonder if it'll warm up soon," replies Wonder.

One Moon later. It is a sunny cold morning coming out of SweatLodge. Walking out to her site, she glimpses OldCoyote smoking a Pipe by River, watching ducks and geese nest. She feels the stress and tension of her worldly life fall away. She settles in for her first day, quickly disappearing into her first night. Stars soooo low you can touch them, twinkle lullabies as she falls asleep on hard cold ground.

Second day Wonder awakes before Dawn. Hoot owls sing their songs. Hoo woo woo woo woowo. They call back and forth to each other endlessly. Wonder wonders, "what is going on? Why am I awake too early?" She is answered by her Womb cramping. A damp feeling spreading, as Blood oozes unexpectedly.

Littlebirds chirp loudly amongst themselves. "We heard her groan real loud." They sing to each other. Humans didn't often come to stay in this Forest, so they are very interested in all of Wonder's activities.

"Oh, What should I do?" Wonder prays aloud to Grandmothers. "Should I walk out? Leave my Fast?" "*You prayed for knowledge of Ancient WomenPower. You will stay for MoonTeachings.*" Spirits tell in shrill Voices.

"Ancient Women's Power" whispers Skunk. "What's that?" "Oh I know all about it. 'Ow many litters of pups 'ave I 'ad? About 10 or so, twelve pups at a time. I 'ear from my cousin Dog, dat if Women 'ave like two or tree, dey tink it's a big deal," Coyote laughs.

"*Dig a pit there. Facing River.*" Everybeing hears. "Look at her" Porcupine whispers. They all stare at Wonder who is now glancing around trying to see where Voices are coming from. "Do you think she never heard Them before?" Rabbit wonders softly, having skipped breakfast to come and see what all the noise was about.

By this time Deer arrives to see what is going on. "*Wonder, Wonder, over here.*" Everybeing looked over to North corner to see who's soft silken Voice that is. "Look at that bright green soft delicious looking moss." Deer says as she licks her lips in appreciation.

Wonder moves Moss gently and lays Tobacco in gratitude for its life. At least this human gives something back," says Skunk tiredly as she starts to turn tail to head home to sleep. "Wait" she quickly whips around. "Look out" Skunk squeals, "she's lifting her Tail." All beings rustle for cover and peer out through underbrush to watch Wonder lift her skirt to precariously perch over her moss-lined pit.

"It's not taking her long to get twitchy, the way she's perched. Looks all un-natural," comments Duck. "If I sat on my nest thataway I'd never get my

eggs hatched." She quacks in glee to all who could hear.

"When all is ready," Wonder tells it to OldOne later, "I lift my skirt. I squat. So this is power of skirt, I think to myself. Skirts enable Openness to Earth Mother. It would be much harder to release on Earth in pants." She laughs now as she tells it. Anybeing there can tell you, she was Not laughing at the time.

"Soon my legs cramp," Wonder continues her Story. "I couldn't believe it. I start to pray real hard. Real Hard. I learn something from that too. I am thinking about how strong my Grandmothers must have been to squat and bleed on Mother Earth. No wonder babies came easy. I am just getting into a little self pity for being too soft and weak, when whamm!"

Coyote arrives back just in time. "Arararararararararar" she howls in glee. "You should 'ave seen it." She told all for a long time to come. "SillyHuman is lyin like Crab outta water. On 'er back. Legs in air. Braids flyin in every direction at once. It's such a sight. Ararararar."

Everybeing laughs long and hard. Wings flapping, fur ruffling, jaws clacking. Everybeing including Wonder. Even she has to laugh at her self. "You can even hear Grandmothers cackling in their high Voices," Rabbit tells it. Then they hear "Get Up."

"There she goes looking around everywhere again," giggles Porcupine. "I am sure I was pushed. But when I glance around, nobody is there," says Wonder when she tells it. "So I pick myself up. I feel a bit cranky. Kind of self-conscious I guess. Here I am trying to be all holy and everything. I guess I would have to honestly say I'm losing my patience."

"I hate to say I told you so, but you have to careful what you pray for," laughs OldOne. "You know you asked for it. You must be prepared to be ready for teachins. Whatever their form," she cackles in glee at the thought of Wonder out in the woods, ass over teakettle. "I'm beginning to understand," says Wonder, feeling very humble.

"Sssshhusshhh!" Snake hisses, her keen hearing picking out Voices in midst of gales of giggles. Suddenly everybeing, including Wonder, can hear Them clearly. A hush falls. You could have heard a leaf drop. "*We knew our bodies rhythm.*"

Felt Blood's readiness. We only squat when Time. We gather together to Feast. Laugh. Talk. Sing. Drum. Pray. We vision. We are in Blood Ceremony. In MoonTime."

Wonder tells it. "It's like I can see inside a hut. I'm wondering if it's a MoonLodge. It has ribs tied like my FastingLodge, but it is much longer and wider. Bigger than a SweatLodge. Women can stand up in it. Move around. YoungOnes go in and out bringing food and drink. OldOnes are working with Bowls. Women Bled Together."

"*Long TimeAgo*" everybeing hears and quits rustling to listen. "*We Women were strong. Held Power. We had Blood Power. A Gift for only Women. We had Blood Ceremony to Honor that Gift. We share our Blood to Earth Mother. Grandmother Moon.*"

"I wonder if it was like an offering, like Tobacco, returning life to EarthMother for all that we take." Wonder says later. "Yes," responds OldOne, "it could have bin."

Shrill Voices continue. "*All Women's Ceremony was Blood ceremony. Woman use her own Blood in Ceremony. Ones finished their Time have strong Power. Can use all Women's Blood. Pray. Heal. Vision. with Blood offerings. More powers in FirstBlood and LastBlood.*"

Wonder tells it. "I see inside AncientOnes Bowls. OldOnes blending Blood with Herbs. Putting Blood on Stones. I see an open wound being tended with BloodClot poultice. I see this and much more. Much much more. Some I can't even remember now."

"So, our Blood is Sacred," Wonder thinks to herself as she lays against Log, watching ducks and geese busy nesting. Sunlight plays on River. "Now women plastic wrap their Blood. Blood never touches EarthMother. Goes on pads. Into plastic bags. Down sewer pipes. Becomes garbage." She wonders how that could ever change now.

"Wake up. I need attention!" Wonder's Womb shrieks loud enough for all beings to hear. "What she doing? nesting again?" quacks Duck loudly as Wonder jumps up to squat again. "Quiet! I hear Voices" honks Goose. "They still want to talk to her. She better listen up. They bite worse than a mad Gander."

"Women gave up their Blood power. Have had it taken from them. No Honor given to Blood or to Women anymore. No one left to tell Truth. No Truth left anymore" They say.

Wonder tells it later. "I imagine huge pile of bloody pads. I remember joking with my sister Judene when pads were first taxed as "luxury" items. 'We'll protest', we said laughing, 'by having women send their used pads to Ottawa by the semi-trailer load'. Truth is," she admits sadly to OldOne, "I have abused my Blood."

Shrill Voices continue. *"Now Men have blood ceremony. War. Murder. Slaughter of Animals and People. Men have blood power. Death power. Women's Power was Blood Power. Life Power."*

"Slaughter of Animals" Deer repeats with a shiver. "That's our worst nightmare. "I've been hunted. We all have been." She says looking around at other beings gathered. "Humans are inhumane" They all nod solemnly. Even predators agree.

"Long ago," Voices trill, *"Women never ate blood. Were never preyed upon. Life is a Circle. Women are Givers of Life. Should only eat that which does not give up Life. Does not give up blood to be eaten."*

Wonder tells it. "I see Women gently, lovingly harvesting wild rice, seeds, nuts, berries, grasses, barks, leaves. Roots taken only once plant is gone to seed." OldOne responds, "you were shown an important lesson. Tender lovin care. To feel compassion for everybein. To show respect for all Lifegivers. Seeds, berries, and leaves are Children to MotherPlants."

Voices continue *"Men rose in power when they began to hunt, to kill, to eat blood to feed themselves. Men saw the power of Women's Blood ceremony."* "IIIIIIII. I love to kill" shrieks Coyote, "that makes me powerful too." "Sssshut up. Your sssso full of yourssself," hisses Snake.

Blanche responds when Wonder tells her Story in Circle later. "I heard about that before. How men revered women as powerful. Magical even. Because we could bleed and not die. We create life with our Blood. When a man bled, wounded after hunting or a battle, his blood was releasing life. Not creating it. It's easy to understand

how Women could be seen as more powerful. Closer to Creator."

Magenta wonders "Has anyone every heard of that guy, Bruno Bettelheim?" Women shrug and shake their heads. "He wrote a book, I read it a long time ago. Must have made an impression. Anyways, I remember he was writing about young men's initiations into manhood. Like puberty. He researched it around the world I think. He thought all the ceremonies they were doing were trying to imitate women. Like our MoonTime and Birthing. I can't remember if he talked about the Sun Dance or not." She strokes her nose, trying to remember. "Anyways, I think his whole idea says something. Especially coming from a man."

"She's going to her nest again," sings Littlebirds. "Suddenly I felt a need to release," Wonder tells it. "When I return to my sitting log, Grandmothers continue Their teaching."

"Some Men wanted to be as Powerful as Women. Offered their own blood and flesh. Offered blood of others. Sacrificed Birds. Animals. Women. Children. to feed their power".

All Beings stared at each other when they heard that. "Grossssss" hissed Snake.

"I remember being grossed out when I read in my anthropology textbook about human sacrifice among Mayans," exclaims Rosie in Circle later. She is so enthusiastic she is just about jumping off her chair. Her hands are waving in the air. "Wow!" she goes on. "I now understand it better. It was some men seeking women's Blood power. I bet it did happen across cultures. That's amazing!!" She says, moving around in her chair all excited. Her green eyes flashing yellow sparks.

As Wonder slowly moves around her site, preparing for nightfall, Voices trill to teach. *"Now most Humans feed on blood power. Get life from death. Death and destruction on Earth Mother is false power. Will give false life."*

"False Life?" Wonder wonders to herself as she dozes off in front of FastFire. Later she speaks about it in Circle. "Yes, life in modern times is pretty false. What is real? Prepackaged food to eat, prefab homes to live in, unknown fibers to wear, TV commercials lie to sell, WorldWideWeb tells all, but Truth." Wonder shakes her head sadly.

Grandmothers are up before Dawn. And so are a bunch of Beings. Waiting in anticipation of Teachings for today. "Long ago" They remind AllBeings one more time. "*Women never ate blood. They did Blood Ceremony. Women had Power and were never preyed upon. Now women abuse their Blood. Eat blood.*" Wonder nods trying not to fall back to sleep.

"*Now women are prey to all. Prey to Men and Children. Prey to Insects. Now Insects abound.*" Voices tell.

Wonder tells it. "When I hear 'Insects abound'. That startles me into shivering awakesness. I always Fast in cold early Spring to avoid Insects. Insects love to feast on me. A few bites and I swoon. I get tired, grouchy, and sick."

"We love insects" quack ducks and geese, happily smacking their beaks on the plentiful water beetles skating on River surface. "Yeah" tweets Littlebirds. "Long ago," little high Voices squeak happily, "*insects were never a problem. Birds preyed upon them. They did not prey upon Humans.*"

"They did not prey upon us! Imagine!" Wonder exclaims to OldOne. "I am stunned. It wiped sleeplessness right out of my eyes."

"*Now insects take your blood. Give it to Mother Earth, because Women don't.*" Voices continue, shocking Wonder even more.

"Insects are filling in for Women's Ceremony!" Wonder shouts at the top of her lungs. "Can you believe it?" Wonder exclaims to Women in Circle later.

"It's a shock to realize that Bugs are not just meant to bug people as I often joke. They too have a Sacred purpose, tied to ours as Women. Imagine. Bugs doing our job!"

"What's she doing now?" asks Muskrat. "Must be nesting again" chirp Littlebirds. Wonder tells it. "My Womb let me know it was Time. So off I go. It is frosty and cold that Dawn. But, there isn't much else I can do about it." Then they all hear, Their pointy Voices, sharp and clear in the cold.

"*Insects have Power. Women do not. Women are now prey. Life is a Circle. If you prey upon others, you will be preyed upon. When women gave up*

Blood ceremonies. Began to eat blood, eat death, they lost Power of Life."

Wonder tells Women in Circle later. "I wonder long and hard what they meant. I want to argue with Them. No chance to get a word in. It wasn't like a conversation. But as I lay watching Sunset. Pink, orange and gold on a green blue River. I wonder, what about abortion, miscarriages, birth defects? What about labour pain, episiotomies, epidurals, cesarean sections?" Wonder says.

Ruby speaks in Circle next. "Yeah. What about my hysterectomy or MaMere's mastectomy? I heard on Oprah that millions of women are having them done around the world. Probably lots of us don't even really need it."

"Let's not forget PMS" Ravensong speaks next. "I hear it's an epidemic. Like ninety percent of women feel stressed, depressed, ill, neurotic, some even psychotic on their Time. I know I feel even more moody than usual. My frustration just seems on the surface of my skin, ready to burst out. I can really get into the Moon Ceremony idea. Time to retreat, meditate, and dream could help me chill out a bit." She closes her eyes as if trying to imagine such a luxury.

"Our loss of power is even deeper," adds Bluebell, always a deeper thinker. "What about Mother blaming, Mother abuse, Elder abuse? What about blatant disrespect by our children? and their fathers? Women in my community have to leave their homes, children, communities, because they fear being beaten to death. No one will help them." Everyone nods. Each of them knows someone personally, or they themselves have been victimized in that way.

"We are prey!" continues Bluebell. "Violence against our Women is seen as normal, even by our YoungOnes. Let's not forget Angelique Lynn Lavalley, she had to kill her husband to end the violence."²

"Women do still give life," clarifies OldOne, "but we are no longer honored in that role. Many of us have to go and work, care for Elders and our Children. Get no help or protection in or out of our homes. Where are the men, so-called protectors of life? Can't see it nowadays. No honor in being a martyr, I always say. Been there. Done that. Got the T-shirt. HaHaHa." OldOne slaps her leg as she cackles. "No. Really. Women carry away

more than our fair share. We're all stooped over with sore backs. Sec." She turns her back to show her curved spine.

Wonder is surprised to notice that darkness has set in. Time is slipping quietly by. She makes ready for her last night. "There she goes nesting again" quacks Duck. Wonder tells it. "Womb nudged me from my thoughtful reverie. I rose to tend her. My mind is swirling. I notice GrandmotherMoon rising over River. I stoke FastFire for nightfall. As I nod in Firelight I hear Their Voices again."

"Remember your Root. Your Blood. Connect your Blood to Mother Earth in Ceremony. Eat no blood. And you will no longer be preyed upon. Reclaim your Grandmothers' Power."

"I've decided I am no longer going to eat blood," Wonder says to people gathered at her AfterFast Feast. "Your call," says an OldOne happily munching on some fresh fried tender strips of Moose, carefully placed with some mashed Chokecherries and a chunk of Lard, between two slices of Bannock. "Mmmmmmmmm" she says.

"It seems once I learn to gather my Blood lovingly, now my MoonTime never returns. It's a bit disappointing." Wonder confides in OldOne much later. "Now, it's your time to teach Women to treasure Blood. Celebrate MoonTime. Acknowledge WomanPower in Ceremonies on full Moons in Women's Lodges." OldOne responds.

Wonder teaches in her Lodge. "I will no longer be preyed upon. I tell swarming Mosquitoes: 'You who once loved to feast upon me, I am not your prey'. I tell leering, stalking predators, 'I am not your prey.' I feel so much safer now."

More and more YoungOnes come to ask "Why should I cut be off from Source? Why should I be prey? In the name of who's Tradition?" Wonder learns to teach. "Some 'rules' are Not necessarily 'the way it has always been' or the way it always will be. Let's go to Source, to Ceremony." She tells questing Women, "Grandmothers know, will tell, all you want to know, and more, much much more. Be open. Be ready. Be powerful. Be Woman."

ENDNOTES

1. According to Sjoog and Mor, "Blood sacrifice occurred worldwide...Mass human sacrifice is definitely linked everywhere with ruling priests and warrior classes in elite male service to a Sun God," *The Great Cosmic Mother*. San Francisco: Harper San Fransosco, 1991, p. 178.

2. R.V. Lavallee (1990), 76C.R. (3d) 329 Supreme Court of Canada.