

Welcome to this edition of Firelight, curated by Sara Wilhelm Garbers. Read on for her meditation on taking back our power, listening to ourselves and our bodies, and sensing the promise of new ways of being.

This Month's Curator

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On Taking Back Our Power

by Sara Wilhelm Garbers
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I recently had the opportunity to preach at a local community of faith and I chose to talk about when Jesus met the woman at the well. Jesus was a Jew. The woman was a Samaritan. These were two groups with historic ethnic divides and conflict. Each believed they worshiped God; each had a specific mountain/temple where they believed God resided.

This kind of notion—that the divine resides in a particular place-- isn't particular to Jews in the time of Jesus, nor was it to Samaritans. The idea that the divine resides in a particular place, and is external to us, is a very human notion. Kingdoms have long been centered with the ruler at its middle, and society orbited them.

The outworking of the concepts that there is an external sovereign who we must give away our power to in order to live and survive has permeated our political philosophy (e.g. Hobbes' *Leviathan*) and many theologies (e.g. much of Christian theology, which is my tradition).

And though our society looks different now than many feudal and other societies of old, often we have been tutored to believe that there must be an external source, a divine sovereign of sorts (look at our political leaders, many popular figures, etc.), who resides outside of us. We long for love. We look for recognition. And we have

been tutored to believe that we are smaller and far less powerful than we actually are...believing we only matter if we are seen by them (this even happens in our personal relationships, right?)

So as we do the work of justice, solidarity, and organizing, I wonder what happens as we keep on taking the power back—even as we fight the systems, engage in intentional power analyses of systems of oppression, and the like? For in so doing, in remembering our own power and rooting ourselves in profound self-recognition, I believe that we have the opportunity to refuse giving more power to, or giving our power away to external powers that we fight.

Does this make sense?

It's like this: for so long I fought for recognition in the midst of systems in which I had experienced profound mis/non-recognition on account of my gender. I desired to be seen, to be known, to be loved as I am. Yet I wasn't.

And while of course I/we all long for recognition and love as we are, the reality is that the external forces might never give it to us.

And as long as we live out of need for recognition of those systems and persons who refuse us, then they remain more powerful than they ought to be.

Our invitation then is to do as many of us have learned through our activist forbearers, through philosophers and theologians, through psychologists, and through those we love: **we take our power back**. We listen to our bodies, we cultivate the capacities to trust our own skin. We give ourselves recognition. We share this recognition with each other and honor one another. We dance. We dream. We fight. We organize. We listen. And we begin to more deeply breathe this truth...we are far more powerful than we even realize.

May we take the power back. May we refuse the systems and ideologies that tell us the external powers are what give or take recognition. **And may we become people who offer the solidarity of honoring the divine power that is each of us.**

This is what I think Jesus meant when he told the Samaritan Woman that the true worshippers don't worship on the mountains of religious communities, but in "Spirit and in Truth." He was saying- **you already have and know it; it's in you. It is you.**

The power and possibility of whole worlds is growing and birthing in you. So keep on gestating. And let's be midwives to each other in the struggle of birthing new worlds together.

You already are. You are already.

So keep on. Keep on. Keep on.

Thanks for joining me around the fire,

Sara

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