

CHALICE AND BLADE: DREAMING A PARTNERSHIP FUTURE

Jonee Kulman Brigham

Abstract

A new poem titled “Chalice and Blade” imagines how a partnership future might be envisioned as it grows from our partnership and domination history. The author describes the poem’s influences, including its primary inspiration that came from the ideas and themes in Riane Eisler’s seminal book, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*.

Keywords: poetry, partnership, love, fear, story

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As an artist, writer, and poet who believes in the power of story as well as in the power of partnership, I was eager to respond to the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*’ invitation to submit articles that create a narrative about a better, partnership-based future. With domination paradigms so ingrained in our current culture, it can be hard to picture a partnership future, and even harder to imagine a theory of change that could bring it about.

But imagination is where the arts shine, so I wrote this poem based on Riane Eisler’s seminal book, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1988). One of the most hopeful things about this book is that it uncovers a deep partnership history where cooperation, caring, and egalitarian values were primary, before the emergence of domination patterns of division, violence, and alienation took over

much of the world. But the story does not end there. By sharing examples of those who are paving the way with inclusion and caring, Eisler invites us to dream and to build our return to a partnership culture. In response, I divided my poem into three acts of human history that parallel the structure of Eisler's story, with the third act extending into an imagined future to complete our restoration to partnership. While inspired by *The Chalice and the Blade*, my poem takes creative license and does not represent a summary nor a mirror of the scholarship of the book.

Chalice and Blade

By Jonee Kulman Brigham, 2024

Dedicated to Riane Eisler

Act 1: Innocence

There was a time when love prevailed and filled our golden cup
our chalice ranneth over and filled the people up
we came from Earth, we breathed her sky
her water flowed through you and I
and she provided sun and rain
we feasted on her fruit and grain
although the harvest rose and waned
we shared with love, and shared the strain

Her gifts received without demand,
we lived a story of the land:
the chalice shares with open hand

Act 2: Forgetting

Perhaps one year the rain was low
the harvest small, the feast below
the portions that we used to know

and we forgot our memory of seasons made to ebb and flow
and how the sharing made love grow

And two or three of us had fears
and whispered in each other's ears
that we had better use our powers
by wielding blades to take what's ours
and in our greed, we took some more
until the others all were poor
and locked outside our pantry door

We used the blade to draw a line
between what's yours and what is mine
man and woman, white and brown
one is up, the other down
a story to preserve the crown

And so it was throughout the years
the chalice empty but for tears
and right and wrong were based on fears
to hold the story that we made:
the chalice lives to serve the blade

Act 3: Restoration

But the love had never really died
for love is what we are inside
we birth it from a sacred womb
like buried seeds it will resume
like flowers blooming in the snow
the chalice rises from below

embracing everything we made
both love, and fear which wields the blade

And in the golden cup appears
the light of love dissolving fears
erasing lines the blade had drawn
that all the greed was based upon
acknowledging our history's stain
apologizing for the pain
repairing harms that had been done
to reconcile us all as one

The blade—it slips from open hand
and falls into the fertile land
an open heart lays down the grain
the chalice tears are used for rain
and in the garden, we have made
the blade becomes a garden spade

Perhaps that year the sun was bright
the harvest sweet, a feast of light
and we remembered how to share
and live within each other's care
and man and woman, white and brown
no longer split in up and down
without the labels that divide
can share the chalice side by side

Remembering the price we paid
we hold the story that we made:
grow the chalice, drop the blade

Imagining a Partnership-Based Future

As in the poem, my vision for a partnership future begins with the Earth and how we relate to it. Influenced by Eisler, I believe that our relationship with the Earth and our relationship with one another are both reflective of and determined by our underlying paradigms. In a previous article for this journal (Brigham, 2017), I examined human-nature paradigms toward a “caring ecology” that were grounded in interrelatedness, caring, and humility. My art practice is also based on these ideas, and the third through fifth lines of Act 1 of the poem above use (by permission) text from a poem I wrote previously called “Children’s Nest Egg” (Brigham, 2007) that was part of a public art project about building a caring relationship with the Earth.

My vision for a partnership future also depends on believing in the basic goodness of humans. In Act 3: Restoration, our innate, loving, resilient human nature rises again because “love is what we are inside.” This is a belief that resonates with the premise of partnership studies: that we originally were, and can return to, a loving-centered society.

But how do we actually make the change to a partnership future? I had a harder time writing the second part of Act 3, because we don’t know how the rise of partnership instincts will actually surpass the reign of domination, so I took inspiration from Edwin Markham’s epigram, “Outwitted” (1915, p.2).

He drew a circle that shut me out —
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!

Markham’s circle works well with the transformative imagery of the chalice, both in its shape and orientation toward love. Eisler (1988) writes, “...the secret of transformation expressed by the Chalice was in earlier times seen as the

consciousness of our unity or linking with one another and all else in the universe” (p. 193).

In this imagined future, the power of love dissolves fear, as well as the need of the fearful to grasp for tools of domination like forceful control over a divided people. There is also a reference to ideas of truth and reconciliation with the need to repair the damage and acknowledge the wrongs done.

In the end of Act 3, the sun shines on everyone. Even if the path is imperfect, we can trust the ancient partnership societies in which expanding love is the foundation of evolutionary transformation. Let’s “grow the chalice, drop the blade.”

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Brigham: Chalice and Blade

Jonee Kulman Brigham is the owner and artist of Full Spring Studio, LLC, established in 2007, where she works in many types of environmental art media united by an interest in human interconnection with nature. She creates and exhibits sculptural and performative public art, sculptural art installations, artist's books, video art, two- and three-dimensional artworks, poetry, and creative writing. She created the art-led experiential environmental education curriculum model, Earth Systems Journey, which is part of Full Spring Studio. Beyond Full Spring Studio, Kulman Brigham is a Senior Research Fellow at the Minnesota Design Center at the University of Minnesota and a Fellow of the Institute on the Environment. Brigham is a licensed architect and integrates perspectives of design, art, and environmental care into her many interdisciplinary endeavors.

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