

The Sacred Feminine in All of US
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Earth Day

INTRO

Today we celebrate our most indispensable inheritance, the very ground under our feet--the source of our food, our water and all nourishment for us and all the flora and fauna of our world: our indispensable planet Earth. Earth Day is a beautiful time to reflect some of humanities oldest spiritual knowledge and wisdom, the Sacred Feminine.

PART 1-EARLY TIMES:

When we go back in time to our earliest ancestors, and what they understood of God, of a creative force that made and shaped the world, including mankind and all flora and fauna, ancestors' oldest, earliest ideas of a divine being was that of a female goddess. A female goddess who births the world, who IS the world, Mother Earth, we might call her, is an understandable concept for our earliest forbearers, who lived and died by the rhythms of nature. Women, like the moon, follow monthly cycles and our mysteries of blood bare and nurture new life. In our earliest cultures and to this day, women gathered and cooked food, nursed the sick, prepared the dying for burial. Women were and are at the heart of every stage of life, every season of passage. Earliest cultures saw this female life as a great goddess, and her echoes are seen in many different civilizations, the stories and names changing and over time while still reflecting deep truths about human experiences.

This great goddess was called many names by many different cultures, so many that she has been referred to as “She of 10,000 Names.” Isis. Astarte. Dianna. Hecate. Demeter. Kali. Inanna.

Her names and stories differed between cultures in the ancient world, but their echoes of similarity are unmistakable. Inanna of the Sumerians, Isis of the Egyptians and Persephone of the Greeks all took journeys to (and from) the Underworld. The themes of death, loss and rebirth permeate these stories, as they predominate human lives. As we seek meaning in the often random and violent world around us, certain truths resonate and thus are reflected in the stories of different cultures throughout the globe. These echoes can be found in the myths of goddess from our most ancient ancestors.

Modern people, with our sophisticated understanding of biology, our unparalleled access to technology might well ask: what benefit is there in looking back to our ancient ancestors, with their limited ability to understand the world? What might they have to teach us about navigating a hostile, often random, and seemingly irredeemable world? The answer lies in the universality of the human experience. From their age to ours, and every age in between, common experiences shape us all—birth, death, falling in love, finding meaningful work, sustaining ourselves and our loved ones.

We are linked to them in a chain, an unbroken line and we inherited this earth from them, this vitality that we stand upon and count upon and would be utterly doomed without. “As it was in the beginning, so it is until the end.”

Isis. Astarte. Dianna. Hecate. Demeter. Kali. Inanna.

PART 2: CHANGING TIMES

In time, the Great Goddess gave way to polytheism, to male gods and goddesses, and in later times the great monotheisms grew and took over the religious landscape of the world; Judaism, Christianity, Islam. The rise of patriarchy and its long historic dominance in world culture relegated the concept of a great goddess to history for a long time. Monotheistic, male-dominated religions honored a jealous god that wiped out traces of other gods, particularly other goddesses, and did the same to the people who worshiped these deities. Demand for universality of thought brought violence to enforce boundaries of belief, thus vestiges of the Sacred Feminine were stamped out of historical and sacred texts, language and understanding. In Judaism, the concept of the Holy Spirit, third part of the godhead trinity, was originally seen as a female aspect with a feminine gender pronoun, but as patriarchy progressed the Holy Spirit's gender was later identified as male. For all Jesus' radical (for the time) ideas of female worth and dignity, Christian history demoted the highly honored apostle Mary Magdalene to the role of a prostitute. Women, by being associated so closely with sex and sexuality, found themselves carrying the weight of human frailty; female guilt for the sins of the world was baked into the creation story of Genesis.

Sex was considered so irreconcilable to the concept of holiness that for over two thousand years, the idea of a Christian Holy Family remains a celibate one—a father and mother who never engaged in marital relations, not even to create their holy child, the son of god. And the son, Jesus, is celibate in order to be the perfect sacrifice, because presumably human flesh is so corrupted by sexual contact that to be less than celibate would render the giving of his life pointless.

This condoning off of social values that separate the qualities of godliness and propriety to men and the qualities of sexuality and corruption to women have

had untold historical consequences, including to our ideas of stewardship of the planet. Was the Earth a vessel to be plundered, or a living being to be cared for and valued? .

Remnants of the goddess were driven underground, into our unconscious, but never extinguished. These remnants can found everywhere today: in the Catholic's reverence for Mary the Mother of Jesus, in the myths of the Greeks that still resonate, in the rise of feminist thought and study in recent decades, in the wiccan movement and the rise of women's circles around the globe, which I have been fortunate to participate in for the last 15 years. This consciousness is often marked by longing and loss, as Karen's beautiful solo spoke: "She's been waiting, waiting, waiting so long. She's been waiting for her children to remember, to return."

PART 3: But who, exactly, is SHE? Surely an acknowledgement of goddess consciousness and spirituality isn't turning in one set of literal myths for another. Surely the point is not to stop believing in Jesus' virgin birth and rising from the dead and substituting Persephone's trip to the underworld in Hades chariot, Athena born directly from the head of Zeus, and Daphne turning into a tree. Of course not. The key is in letting go of the limited, literal understanding so that the rich truths of the myths can shine through, highlighting the striking similarities of human experience throughout time. From that light, we can see in the story of Persephone's abduction the passage that accompanies every young woman's journey from maidenhood into adulthood, a journey that often takes one into the shadows of the metaphorical underworld. Athena, the goddess of wisdom springing full grown from her father's head can be seen as part of the psychic takeover of patriarchal creation powers from the sacred feminine, and there is

something of primal familiarity in the story of Daphne turning into a tree to avoid attack that I imagine all women can relate to.

PART NEXT: What do we see when we look towards a divine figure? Are we projecting outward, attempting to draw an understanding from some formless but hopefully loving deity who might or might not exist? Or are we reaching inward, into our own muddled minds and hearts, trying to draw those understandings from our shared experiences combined with our inner wisdom? For me, the truth is found in the words of Starhawk:

*“unless you know the Mystery:
for if that which you seek,
you find not within yourself,
you will never find it without.
For behold,
I have been with you
from the beginning.
and I am that which is attained
at the end of desire.”*

Like Dorothy, we had the power to come home all along.

That still, small voice of the goddess says: “I have been with you in the beginning, because I am you.” My magical women friends have a saying: “The goddess is alive and magick is afoot.” The goddess is alive because we are alive and magick is afoot because we are magick.

The qualities we look for in the divine are the qualities we look for in ourselves. Whether we honor the masculine divine, the feminine divine or some other way of identifying with the life-giving animating force—what we project outward into the proverbial heavens is what we are looking for most in our hearts. And in our loved ones. What we call to the heavens to find is waiting for us, for that still, quiet moment when we come back to ourselves, in our minds. In our garden, at the beach, in the company of trees. When we say “thank you.” When the She who is waiting inhales and we exhale with her and the world draws its breath once more. That holy, living spirit is in us—in women and men, as the glorious qualities--the masculine and feminine qualities – in all of us.

So--When the qualities that make up a richly diverse, complex and interdependent world are cordoned off into “male” and “female”, are we needlessly limiting ourselves? Are we cutting off our access to all parts of ourselves by randomly assigning stigmatizing the use of our non-gender associated qualities, thus ensuring that we will be forever limited in finding our own solutions? If there are social and even legal penalties for women who step outside the accepted boundaries of what is means to be female, are we keeping our women from reaching their deepest spiritual potential, and with it their ability control our own destinies? And if we (arguably) inflict even greater penalties upon men who act in ways that are construed as feminine, are we denying them the ability to access their full range of human depths? What is the effect of such limitations on both genders to collectively solve the greatest problems facing humanity and our planet? If we look inside ourselves for our best good, as highlighted by aspects of the gods and goddesses, we need access to the brilliance of our inner Athena as well as the creativity of our inner Dionysus. Going forward into our future environmental

challenges, we will need our Artemis for the hunt as well as the fierce protection of Zeus' powers. Balance might well be what's needed in this world to save it.

FINISH: There are few things I know for sure in this world, and one is the I come from a long line of women that link from my mother all the way back through generations of my family back and back to the mythical Eve. We come from one another like Russian nesting dolls in a lineage that goes back to the dawn of time, back to the other organisms that were our ancestors, all the way back to the sea.

Who is she and why do we call her name? She is our mother, our grandmothers, our best friends and our sisters, born and made. When we call to our sister, we are calling to the goddess. When we call her name, we are calling to ourselves: our greatest, highest, and most godlike and goddess selves.

Sometimes, when we gather in women's circles, we introduce ourselves by naming and honoring the line of women we come from:

I am Suzanne, daughter of Ida, daughter of Lelia, daughter of Ida Belle, granddaughter of Doris Ida.

Isis. Astarte. Dianna. Hecate. Demeter. Kali. Inanna.

Blessed be.