

# TIGER LILY

JOURNAL BY WOMEN OF COLOUR



## WOMEN AND SPIRITUALITY

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# Women and Spirituality

## Inanna and the Divine Essences

Lady of all the essences, full light,  
good woman clothed in radiance  
whom heaven and earth love,  
temple friend of An,  
you wear great ornaments,  
you desire the tiara of the high priestess  
whose hand holds the seven essences.

Tiger Lily Journal  
Issue #17/18



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# TIGER LILY

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Journal by Women of Colour

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*Charlene Jones*

Since women in patriarchy have been associated with the dark aspect, the negative, the left side, it may be fitting to introduce an editorial about women's spirituality by describing some of what it is not.

Women's spirituality is not monolithic: it has no single tenet or prescribed set of written beliefs which underlie all other beliefs. Since it is at home in every aspect of this life, since every part of this life springs from the Goddess, spirituality for women, even women who profess no allegiance with the Goddess, includes daily activities, education, research, friendship, healing, politics, the totality of our lives.

Women's spirituality has no concept of sin, guilt or evil. All which is, is from the source of life. Events or people may however, fall into a state of imbalance. The result of imbalance can be personal illness and healing, as we read in Chris Weston's moving piece *"Temples and Prayers"* or political injustice, as described in the finely woven and subtle invitation to action of Sister Mary John Mananzan in *"The Emerging Spirituality of Women (Asian Experience)"*.

Women's spirituality does not rely on outer figures of authority. Each person is connected to the life force and therefore, each person's experience of the force is indisputable. Naline Virmani reminds us of the power of friendships based in power-sharing in her lovely piece *"Women and Spirituality — A Personal Account of the Friendships that Enlighten."*

Since every person is his or her own spiritual authority, diversity of experience and viewpoint abound. From the West African Goddesses described by Ann Wallace, to the detailed and esoteric



Tibetan Buddhist Goddesses, to the fine research on "*Goddesses and the Emergence of Patriarchy in the Eastern Mediterranean*" by Professor Johanna H. Stuckey, all forms of the Goddess are revered, honoured and welcome.

Women's spirituality is not transcendent, but is imminent. It is concerned with life here, on this planet. "*Small Heroes*" describes the power of spirit harnessed to the body, the daily life, Joan Vinall-Cox's "*Finding Our Way*" opens up the journey of spirituality in the realm of education and Liz Moes' frank discussion of Wiccan culture provides a glimpse into one of the fastest growing religions of the modern day. Leslie Hamson's lovely piece "*The Refuge Lady*", originally meant for voice, describes a loving perspective of our Mother Earth. I encourage you to gather with friends of like heart and read this piece aloud. The power of healing is in breath and this piece reads as a healing prayer for the planet. We all have the power to heal. Women's spirituality nourishes our ability to consciously share in the process of healing necessary for this time.

Finally, since women's spirituality is indivisible from ritual, performance and all the arts, poetry by Cecilie Kwiat and Linda Stitt invite us to perceive ourselves, to re-see ourselves as conscious, willing partners in a dance of the universal whole.

Women's spirituality is not teleological. That is, it is not a concerned with the endings of things. It is, however, a way of opening to the potential in transformation of consciousness. I welcome this opportunity to invite and encourage you in your struggles and triumphs of personal transformation and to thank you, on behalf of our contributors and editorial board, for the fun and insight this work has given us.

Charlene Jones

# Goddesses and the Emergence of Patriarchy in the Eastern Mediterranean

by Johanna Stuckey

**F**or a scholar such as myself who studies ancient goddesses, the past ten years have been a very stimulating and exciting time. I have watched with delight the revival of the idea and image of goddesses. More and more women are revelling in the return of goddesses, though there are, of course, those who insist that goddesses never left — that we left them!

For close to twenty years I have been doing research that, I realize now, inevitably led me to goddesses, and during that period I have been teaching courses which have increasingly focused on goddesses. When I first started to deal with goddesses in my classes, I sensed in my students both bewilderment and some anger, as well as a feeling of enlightenment — bewilderment about why no one had mentioned such goddesses before, anger at their possibly having been suppressed, and enlightenment through realization of new spiritual possibilities. Undoubtedly, interest in goddesses continues to grow among women and some men: if nothing else, the proliferation of books about them and the steady and strong enrolments in my classes on goddesses demonstrate that interest.

It is my sense that, in goddesses, women in particular seek not only their lost past, but a spiritual alternative or corrective for today's male-centred religions as well as symbols of all that seems

lacking in this polarised male-dominated society we live in. Goddesses, women discover, represent the divine in the female and the female in the divine, those elements that male-dominated religions either lack altogether or “damn with faint praise.” Further, women find in goddesses the confirmation that in unity there is diversity, in diversity unity, a radical idea in a culture committed to dualistic thinking. As the ancient world knew, the Goddess is the One and the Many!

My search for ancient goddesses has led me to research the distant past, indeed prehistoric times before there was writing. From that time all that remains is visual material such as reliefs, figurines, and signs or symbols marked on cave walls and small objects. Immediately the problems of interpretation arises. How can we know, for instance, that the Palaeolithic or Old Stone Age “Venuses” represent goddesses? These female figurines, found all over Europe in a variety of sites and dated between 30,000 and 10,000 BCE, are usually very small and very fat, and often they appear pregnant. There are, of course, arguments for and against our seeing them as goddess images, but it is important to note that neither I nor anyone else can *prove* what they meant to those who so lovingly made them.

The people to whom scholars have attributed the figurines were almost certainly foragers, people who gathered and hunted their food, but did not cultivate plants and raise animals. They were, to judge from social arrangements of similar modern foragers, essentially egalitarian. If they had a division of labour based on sex, it would probably have been a very simple one. Among most modern foragers, for instance, women do most of the gathering of plant material and men the hunting of large game. In such societies the status of women is high, in all likelihood because of women’s enormous contribution to the sustenance of the group. The attitude of foragers to nature is usually positive, and they tend to consider a female deity to have been the source of the world and its creatures. If the Palaeolithic “Venuses” of Europe were the creation of foragers of this kind, I tend to think that they probably did represent goddesses, perhaps even *the* Goddess.

After considerable experimentation with plants in the Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age period, 10,000 – c.8000 BCE, ancient people in the Eastern Mediterranean finally discovered how to domesticate plants and then animals. Indeed the Neolithic or New



Stone Age period, beginning sometime around 8000 BCE, was the age of cultivation. The discovery of farming potentially changed everything, though not for everyone and certainly not immediately. Some scholars have argued that women discovered farming. If they did, then it seems to me that they might have been sowing the seeds of their own demotion in status, for farming was partly responsible for the rise of male dominance.

At first, however, these people began to farm in an uncomplicated way: they practised horticulture or gardening, the cultivation of small plots with hand tools. In modern horticultural societies, women are normally the farmers, though men usually help in clearing the land. Further, women control the distribution of the produce, with the result that their status remains high. Many scholars argue that prehistoric horticulturalists had similar economic arrangements.

From the Neolithic period, the time of the first farmers, comes the earliest really convincing evidence of goddess worship. From digs all over the Mediterranean basin, archaeologists have recovered numerous female figurines, most of which they found in contexts that seem to have been religious in nature. Many scholars have therefore concluded that the figurines indicate goddess worship. A case in point is Neolithic Çatal Hüyük, a now famous site in Turkey.

At Çatal Hüyük archaeologist James Mellaart found remains of a Neolithic culture that had existed for at least 1200 years. By luck he chose to dig first into what appears to have been an area of shrines. The area produced many wall reliefs and figurines which Mellaart concluded were representations of goddesses or rather, as he thought, a triple goddess. Since many of the female images were depicted as fat, pregnant, or giving birth, Mellaart surmised that the religion of the site must have been primarily one of fertility. As well as the female figurines, Mellaart discovered a few representations of males, at least one of which he interpreted as a son-lover of his triple Goddess, subordinate to her, but nonetheless necessary. Other scholars have speculated that this deity was perhaps a forerunner of fertility gods of the Tammuz or Adonis type who disappear at the end of the grain-growing season and reappear when grain begins to grow again.

Although, in its upper levels, Çatal Hüyük seems to have been a large town which was probably developing into a city, Mellaart



interpreted the remains of its 1200 years or so of existence as providing evidence that the Neolithic settlement was a peaceful, stable society and, judging from human remains, he concluded that Çatal Hüyük was populated by at least two racial groups that seemingly were living together in harmony. Because female religious representations, mainly birth goddesses, predominated at the site and because female burials seemed to have been given special treatment, Mellaart thought that Neolithic Çatal Hüyük had been a matriarchy, a society ruled by women. However, given what we now know about horticultural societies, I think that, at its early levels, it was much more likely to have been egalitarian, with male dominance possibly beginning at its later levels.

Female figurines, both fat and thin, occur in almost every other Neolithic site excavated in the Mediterranean basin, many more, indeed, than in European sites from the Upper Palaeolithic period. The visual resemblance of many of these Neolithic figurines to those of the Upper Palaeolithic seems to me striking. It would be safe, I suggest, to call the Neolithic not only the period of farming, but also of fertility goddesses.

However, I should point out that worship of goddesses of fertility does not necessarily result in high status for women, indeed often the contrary. Fertility worship tends to isolate a goddess's birth-giving capabilities and concentrate on them to the exclusion of her other attributes and functions. Thus worship of mother goddesses might tend to present women with only one kind of religious role model and therefore to restrict their life options, much as veneration of the Virgin Mary can do for women today. However, a gradual increase in emphasis on mother goddesses would make sense in the context of a slow development of male dominance during the latter part of the Neolithic.

According to archaeologists, in levels dating to the later Neolithic, and especially the period 4000 – 3000 BCE, many sites begin to show signs of urbanisation, the process of developing into a city. The development of cities usually becomes possible when people start practising agriculture, farming using plough or irrigation or both. As farming shifts from horticulture to agriculture, men tend gradually to take farming over, and women slowly get relegated to domestic tasks. By the Late Neolithic in the eastern Mediterranean, male dominance was probably already well underway, for it seems clear from written documents that date from

around 3000 BCE and after that the societies which produced them had been, for a considerable length of time, not only urbanised and organised by class, but fully male-dominated. There is little doubt, then, that, in the eastern Mediterranean and probably elsewhere, development of agriculture signalled a change in the social organization of farming cultures.

Those ancient peoples who gradually abandoned foraging and shifted to farming as their method of food production probably experienced a subtle alteration in their attitude to nature. Foragers collect nature's bounty; with their hand tools, horticulturalists encourage nature to produce; but agriculturalists, especially those who plough, force nature to yield its fruits, and as abundantly as possible.

There is some evidence from the poetry of the agriculturally based male-dominated cities of Mesopotamia, now mostly modern Iraq, that ploughing and sexual intercourse were seen as similar activities. The goddess Inanna, for instance, whom religious poetry often depicts as a young woman looking for a mate, asks in one poem: "Who will plough my vulva?" Further, other religious poems present the chief god of Sumer, Enlil, as a rapist, and, not surprisingly, they also credit him with the invention of the pick-axe and, usually, the plough. Moreover, Enlil is not the only male deity whom Mesopotamian poetry portrays as rapist, a mythic situation that, I suggest, occurred in Mesopotamia, at least partly because it was a culture that depended on plough farming.

The reasons why men gradually took over farming must have been complex, but differential strength would not have been *the* major factor. Some scholars theorize that the more dependent on the products of farming a society gets, that is, the more important crops become for its subsistence, the more likely it is that men will take over control of cultivation and its results. In addition, the larger the group grows, the greater is the likelihood that farming will become the main economic activity of males. Furthermore, childbearing and child rearing may have had a central impact on women's eventual loss of control of the production and distribution of crop foods.

Most foraging cultures seem to enjoy low average birth rates, one child every four or five years, whereas high average birth rates characterize farming cultures, especially agricultural ones. In the world of the Late Neolithic, child rearing under such circum-

stances would likely have been, or soon would have become, incompatible with ploughing and irrigation, for, even in an extended-family situation, a pregnant mother would still have been responsible, all at the same time, for a baby, a toddler, and maybe even one or two other very young and dependent children. So women would, in all probability, have gradually abandoned work in the fields and concentrated on eventually less important, albeit necessary, domestic tasks at or near home. Men, on the other hand, free of time-consuming child-rearing responsibilities, would have been the ones who took on the eventually more important task of tending the fields, often at some distance from home. Such a division of labour could have provided, and probably did provide, the basis for the gradual separation of the spheres of women and men that completed itself in the assignment of women to private roles and men to public ones as is usual today.

Undoubtedly, other factors must also have contributed to the shift to male dominance and the lowering over time of the status of women. For instance, in cities that flourish on the enormous surplus which agriculture tends to provide, those in power usually move to centralize political control of the population of a given urban and rural area. Typically, people that live in societies which are politically centralised do specialised work, and such societies are characterised by class structure and male dominance.

In the early cities of Mesopotamia, for instance, the first elite groups seem to have developed as a result of the decision of priestesses and priests to constitute themselves overseers for the deities who, the culture thought, owned all of the land. Finally, on behalf of the deities, they controlled not only the myth and ideology of the cities, but also the agricultural surplus and thus economic and social life. In Mesopotamia, differences over vital water and land rights caused fighting and eventually warfare; men who perhaps had originally been elected to lead only in times of strife seem, as occasional strife became warfare, almost imperceptibly, to have become kings. Thus, in Mesopotamian cities, which were divorced from the land, but dependent on it, men came to dominate in warlike, urban societies organised by class; these cities relegated women, with some exceptions, to the bottom of whatever class they found themselves in.

As societies slowly changed on the way to male dominance, myths would also have undergone changes, or new ones have been



developed, to validate the altered and altering situation. Typically, such myths redefine the capabilities of the sexes and the relationship between them. For instance, during millennia of farming, images and concepts of goddesses had, it seems likely, been being slowly changed to fit changing situations, particularly to focus on the goddesses' fertility functions. In addition, the process of urbanisation seems to have produced many goddesses, each with a restricted area of control. The purpose of this proliferation of goddesses and limitation of their power was, I suggest, to make them ideologically useful to the patriarchal city. Fertility goddesses, particularly those whom time and circumstance had made into mother goddesses, were of obvious value, though it is likely that their power needed to be limited further. An example might be Ninhursaga, the Earth Mother of ancient Mesopotamia. Though a great goddess, she had passive, rather than active power: when she was affronted, her reaction was to refuse to give birth. As a rule, however, poems depict her as supporting the divine male hierarchy.

Perhaps in many ways the most important deity of early Mesopotamia was the adored and feared Queen of Heaven, the goddess Inanna. "Maiden" Inanna always carried with her suggestions of a past as a fertility goddess. However, although some poems assign children to her, Inanna was definitely not a mother goddess. Traditionally, she was a "virgin," that is, an independent goddess, not mated *permanently* to one of the gods. It is clear from the poems about her that the headstrong goddess was used to getting her own way by fair means or foul. What could a male-dominated society do with such as she? The earliest urban culture in Mesopotamia appears to have succeeded quite effectively in limiting her power by giving her, among others, one overriding responsibility — that of the making of kings in the so-called "Sacred Marriage Rite." In this rite the man who was to become king, or to renew his kingship, achieved the support of the goddess Inanna by pleasing her sexually; only then could he presume to rule from the throne which *she* had provided and sustained. The king was understood to have ensured, through his mating with her, the continued fertility and safety of the land. The mythic material of Mesopotamia repeatedly insists that no king could reign without Inanna's approval. Surely this prerogative to install kings gave the goddess supreme power? Not so, for priests, probably tampering with



ancient traditions, found ways to have Inanna co-operate in her own demotion, so that, of her own accord, she curtailed her autonomy and curbed somewhat her assertive nature. Thus monarchs in male-dominated Mesopotamia were able to continue to validate their rule through their relationship with a no longer threatening goddess.

Soon, and especially under succeeding regimes of Mesopotamia, Inanna became identified with Semitic Ishtar. As male dominance tightened its hold on Mesopotamian society, increasingly Inanna/Ishtar's sphere shrank until she became specialised as a goddess of love and war. Nevertheless, so strong and conservative was religious and mythic tradition that Mesopotamian kings, even later imperial despots, still deemed it necessary to present themselves as "beloved of Ishtar." What must the goddess's power have been like in the times before male dominance?

What can we say about the role of semi-nomadic invaders in the shift to male dominance? Most of the above hypothetical situations, especially if, as was likely, some or all of them were operating together, could have produced patriarchy without the intervention of invaders. However, the historical record does attest to movements of peoples, and, sometimes, invasions by male-dominated groups that were encroaching on societies which, I must stress, were usually already male-dominated. Undoubtedly such events did, in some cases, accelerate change, particularly change in religion, which, as I have said, is normally very conservative and therefore slow to respond to alterations in social structure. It is highly unlikely, however, that, except in rare cases, such invaders *caused* a shift to male dominance.

Of course there may have been, and probably were, similar movements of peoples and invasions in prehistoric times, and it is certainly possible that such movements also stimulated cultures to change more quickly than otherwise they would have. However, we cannot know for sure what happened in prehistoric times, and a combination of other theories such as the ones I have outlined above can quite adequately explain the emergence of male dominance.

Around 3100 BCE in the bustling, urban, and, as we have seen, already male-dominated societies of Mesopotamia, someone invented writing. Because the Mesopotamian scribe of the gods and patron of writing was a goddess, the inventor of writing, some

say, must have been a woman. There is no doubt that some of the earliest written texts come from the great temple of Inanna at Uruk in southern Mesopotamia. Be that as it may, Inanna is the oldest goddess about whom, to date, we have written testimony. Unfortunately, the texts concerning her exist in late copies from male-dominated societies. An analysis of the texts about Inanna demonstrates that, like all written material about Mesopotamian deities, they have undergone extensive editing over many centuries, as scribes and other priests carefully and subtly altered them not only to reflect the realities around them, but also, it seems fair to assume, to influence those realities. Nonetheless, careful analysis of such material often can tell us a great deal about the goddess and her origins.

It is, of course, not until we have written testimony that we can say for sure that an image that is female represents a goddess. Once we have established the symbols and signs of a particular divinity, however, we can, with extreme caution, attempt to identify some of the prehistoric images. Nonetheless, goddess researchers like me, who are trying to interpret prehistoric visual material, often find themselves having to talk about probabilities or to sound much more positive about their interpretations than they actually should be.

Luckily, the research that I am engaged on at present rarely faces me with this problem. For some years now, I have been deeply interested in the goddesses of ancient Canaan, now the land of Israel. I have been focusing their manifestations in the period 150–1200 BCE, known as the Late Bronze Age. Later, similar goddesses were important deities in the “foreign” religion that, according to the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, proved so very attractive to many of the Israelites who were settling in “the promised land” about 12 BCE, the beginning of the Iron Age. As a result the Hebrew Bible vigorously attacks Canaanite religion. Fortunately, there are extant sources other than the generally hostile Hebrew Bible in which we can encounter similar deities.

In 1929, on the coast of Syria, a farmer ploughing his fields accidentally uncovered an ancient tomb. Following up this clue led scholars to one of the major archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century, the remains of the ancient city of Ugarit, which had been a flourishing city-state in the Late Bronze Age and had

been destroyed around 1200 BCE. Not long after excavation had begun, workers unearthed a library consisting of around 15,000 clay tablets covered with cuneiform or wedge-shaped writing. Not only did many of the tablets turn out to be written in alphabetic script, perhaps the earliest alphabetic script of the ancient eastern Mediterranean, but also the language of most of them proved to be a Semitic one with close similarities to Hebrew. What is even more exciting, many of the tablets contained mythic poetry about deities whose names appear in the Hebrew Bible — among them, the god Baal and goddesses Asherah, Astarte, and Anat.

The Hebrew Bible claims that the ancient Israelites entered the land of Canaan as invaders and conquerors. For many years scholars have been debating what actual form the Conquest took and presenting various theories about it. In the recent past there have been a great many archaeological excavations in Israel, the land of Canaan, and, for the first time, we have available to us a pretty clear archaeological picture of the area at the time of the purported arrival of the Israelites. Consequently, most scholars are now in agreement that the Israelite settlement in Canaan could not have happened as the Hebrew Bible describes it. Rather, they suggest, the Israelites were peaceful infiltrators at the end of the Late Bronze Age, who took advantage of social and political upheaval in the whole area to begin to establish themselves in unpopulated or sparsely populated areas of the hill country of Canaan.

What would the land of Canaan have been like in the Late Bronze Age, 1550–1200 BCE?

In the period just before and when the Israelites became a presence in the area, Canaan was under the control of male-dominated city-states based in agriculture. These cities were hierarchically organised and ruled by kings with the help of aristocracies. The period was also a time of political, social, and economic unrest, and it ended with the disastrous incursions of attackers whom the Egyptians called “the Sea Peoples.” After destroying many cultures, among them the Hittite Empire and the city-state of Ugarit, the Sea Peoples succeeded in appropriating the coastal area of Canaan and eventually became the Biblical Philistines. It was in this world that the ancient Israelites began to settle at the end of the Late Bronze Age. And it was against the principal deities of the pantheon of Canaan that the writers of the



Hebrew Bible inveighed; among these deities were at least two very powerful goddesses.

The male-dominated mythic and religious texts from ancient Ugarit describe goddesses similar to those whom the Hebrew Bible attacks. An examination of these texts demonstrates, I think, that such seemingly powerful female deities were, in all meaningful ways, subordinate to male deities in a pantheon presided over by a distant patriarch called simply El, "God." Even Elat, "Goddess," Lady Asherah of the Sea, had, as her main role, mothering the other deities and, on behalf of younger gods, interceding with grey-haired El, whose consort she may have been. The name Asherah appears forty times in the Hebrew Bible, but usually disguised in a masculine plural noun *asherim*. As a result most scholars and translators of the Hebrew Bible were not at all clear what the *asherim* were, the majority concluding that they were some sort of wooden cultic object closely associated with the worship of Baal.

Ugaritic texts present the blood-thirsty warrior goddess Anat as powerful, assertive, and independent, and her normal epithet "Virgin" indicates that she may once have been really autonomous. However, in the poems she voluntarily puts her enormous energies and emotions at the god Baal's disposal. On his behalf she acts like a fiercely protective mother in fighting his battles and generally improving his status. Baal, the storm and rain god, who may have been Anat's brother, was the god of fertility at Ugarit. When Anat does act on her own in one or two of the decidedly male-dominated poems, her aggression, blood-thirstiness, and arrogance show her as extremely dangerous. Except for the occasional occurrence of her name in personal and place names, the Hebrew Bible ignores her — considering her nature, hardly a surprise!

Astarte, who was later to become an extremely important goddess in the eastern Mediterranean, appears in the Ugaritic texts as a mere adjunct of Baal. As *Ashtoreth*, she shares Asherah's vilification in the Hebrew Bible. In it her name occurs nine times, either in the singular or plural form, and she continues her very close relationship with the god Baal.

When the Israelites began to settle in the land of Canaan, they seem to have had little difficulty adopting the worship patterns of the Canaanites. There is even considerable evidence that, for a



very long time, Asherah was part of official and unofficial Israelite worship, maybe even as consort of the Israelite god Yahweh. Indeed scholars have argued that Asherah remained part of official worship, on and off, at least until the destruction of the Solomonic temple in the sixth century BCE. As far as the Hebrew Bible is concerned, however, Asherah is to be classed with Baal and Astarte as an abhorred and foreign deity. Nonetheless, the Hebrew Bible's attacks on the Baals and the Ashtoreths indicate that many Israelites were drawn to their worship, and archaeologists have demonstrated, through the myriads of goddess figurines which they have recovered from Israelite sites all over the area, that veneration of goddesses was particularly popular. One archaeologist has gone so far as to term such worship "tolerated non-conformist" religion.

Over the centuries goddess worship has proved very difficult for opponents to eradicate. Undoubtedly, along with other forms of paganism, it persisted well into our era, either openly or secretly, not only in the eastern Mediterranean, but all over the Mediterranean basin. It even survived repeated attempts by the Christianised Roman Empire and its successors, from the fourth century on, to ban pagan worship. Throughout the Dark and Middle Ages anguished Christian writers repeat, over and over again, strictures against what we would call folk customs, but which they saw as the persistence of pagan practices, including evidence of goddess worship. In the early modern period, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the European witch craze may have uncovered part of what some scholars have argued was a very ancient underground nature religion in which goddesses played a central role. After the time of the witch burnings, this interdicted religion, they maintain, became secret once again and did not resurface in Europe until a widespread interest in witchcraft manifested itself as part of the fascination with the occult in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, any witches and other goddess worshippers still practising their rites would have had to keep their faith and rituals secret because of laws banning witchcraft. A great many contemporary witches and goddess worshippers see themselves continuing a religious tradition that has never been broken, only forced into hiding; others think of themselves as reviving an ancient religion, numerous practices of which have been irretrievably lost.

Many of the world's peoples have, of course, never stopped worshipping goddesses, despite strenuous attempts by colonisers to eliminate what they classed as pagan rites. Examples of goddesses worshipped today include Kuan Yin and Tara in China and other Asian countries; Kali, Shakti, and Sarasvati in India; Amaterasu in Japan; Sussistanako "Spider Woman," Asintmah, Sedna, and Pasowee among the First Peoples of North America; and Oshun, Nyale, Oya, and Yemoya in Africa.

Nor should we here neglect to mention the Virgin Mary. Though not called a goddess, she has taken on, over the centuries, many of the titles of ancient goddesses; for example, among her many epithets, she is, in addition to "Virgin," "Queen of Heaven," *Stella Maris* "Star of the Sea," "Lady of Mercy," and "Mother of God." In fact, in her name Christianity appropriated many ancient goddess shrines and temples: the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris built over a Celtic shrine; the Mary chapels at Demeter's Eleusis and Diana's Ephesus; the Cathedral to Mary in Mexico City on the temple of Coatlicue, the Aztec mother of the gods — the list is very long.

So, despite millennia of destructive efforts by male-dominated societies, goddesses are still being worshipped, and in North America their veneration seems now to be on the increase. The return of goddesses when ecological disaster constitutes a planet-wide threat surely can be no accident. Goddess worshippers in North America today are, many of them, deeply involved in both the ecology and the peace movements. Activists like American witch Starhawk warn us of the danger we are in as a result of our ignoring goddesses and of what we stand to lose by continuing our abusive course. In this respect it seems to me significant that one of the principal titles of ancient goddesses was "Mother of All Living," that, "Life."

### *Suggested Reading*

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# Prayers and Temples

by Chris Weston

Pain is the only reality I can imagine. Warm, sticky blood seeps over the surface of my burning skin. It oozes into my mind like pus oozing from an infected cut. Silently I scream and invisible tears pour from my frightened eyes. As the other nurses try to stop the bleeding, the head nurse, going bald from stress, asks me if I would like to hear a passage from the Bible. "It will comfort you," she says. I am a Buddhist I tell her as a memory flashes through my mind: the chaos of the street bursting with life, human life, poverty, filth, hunger, greed, and a tree. Beams of sunlight stream through the branches of the tree lighting up each dancing leaf, sending dappled swaying shadows to the earth. An old monk dressed in grey robes and wrinkled skin turns his serene eyes up to meet the light playing in the dancing leaves. The peace he knows fills my heart.

The mosques with their great domed roofs adorned with a gold quarter moon and star were barred from me, being a woman. In the morning, my deep, peaceful sleep was destroyed by prayers to Allah blasting into space through the electronic sound systems that top each mosque's dome. Five times a day traffic came to a standstill, conversations halted in mid-sentence, children ceased playing and mothers stopped cooking as the men entered the mosques to chant. "Allah is great, Allah is the only god, to Allah we prostrate ourselves." Sometimes I found myself waiting for the



men to come out of the mosques and wash their feet. Gazing at the trails of wet footprints in the musty earth of the mosque's courtyard, I wondered what possible powers absent of women could transform the cruel souls of men.

The Buddhist temples of Bangkok sent my mind whirling. The golden Buddhas, the jewelled ornaments and sky-scraping pagodas complicated all the teachings of the Buddha I had believed without a doubt. I watched devout Thais prostrate themselves before the golden Buddhas in hopes of gaining enough merit for a higher rebirth, while their stomachs grumbled with hunger. The people need a high ideal to look forward to, to give them hope when there is no more faith in their daily lives, I was told as justification for the ragged children selling kleenex in the streets against the backdrop of squandered wealth of a golden religion. These decadent temples were not what I hoped to find in a Buddhist country. I am reminded of the Vatican, as my mind touched my money belt, where pickpockets swarm, circling naïve tourists and Christians. The glittering temples of Bangkok filled me with doubt that eats away my faith.

Roaming the back alleys of Bangkok searching for curiosities in the filth, I came across a small forgotten temple not mentioned in the tourist guidebooks. The stone Buddha with a forever peaceful smile carved on his face sat enclosed by walls of dark brown teak. Blossoming flowers perfumed the air as a Thai housewife offered up a plate of fresh mango to the heavens. I decided this might be a suitable place to meditate and sat in a lotus posture on the wooden floor. While I watched my breath, an elderly monk, picking his teeth with his fingernail, watched me. What is she doing here, I heard his mind whisper. Not really knowing, I got up and left.

Asians will go to great cost to save face, not wanting to afflict each other with their emotions or cause shame. Yet if you have white skin, they stop in their tracks to stare at you with penetrating eyes, a taboo in the West. Westerners save face by lowering their eyes and never really looking.

The Singaporeans gather outside the open doors of my small room in the ICU staring at me. Families of mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, aunts, uncles and cousins stand transfixed by the

fact that a white woman is in their Asian hospital. As they watch me breathe through the machine, they wonder how I came to be there, where I am from, how old I am, and if I will live. In the room next door to me a siren begins to scream, someone has stopped breathing, as the nurses rush into the room the extended families stop them to ask questions about me. Quickly, with politeness, the nurses answer their questions and the staring families nod their heads knowingly, look my way one more time and move on.

At first I am too sick to care that they stare. I simply turn my eyes away and like an ostrich, pretend that because I cannot see them, they are not there. When I have enough energy and the pain is driving me mad, I glare back at them, meeting their eyes until, uncomfortable, they scurry away. Then I begin to remember the Asian I have met in my travels. It was the Asians who taught me how to look another in the eyes, to see deeper than the skin, beyond the surface smile. With these memories I no longer feel the Asian eyes are intruding on my individual rights and I know they mean no real harm. When I accept their eyes, they begin to come into my room and pray over me. The Hindus in their bright saris, murmur mantra over my body. The wealthy Chinese Christians hold my hand and turn their eyes towards heaven silently whispering prayers. In other rooms I can hear the Muslims singing. I cannot understand their words, but the sweet sorrow of their prayers to Allah for the wellness of a beloved brings warmth to my heart. It is then I realize all people love, mourn, and die. It is then I realize what a wonderful gift prayer is.

Black patches appeared where the red tiles have fallen from the roof. Dusty grey spots grew on the walls as the pink paint is chipped away through time, poverty and war. In front of the rusted gates that no longer close, the maimed and cripple begged, wearing smiles. In the courtyard under a tired tree giving respite from a glaring sun, women crouched on the ground beside bamboo cages of pigeons. In the rich temples of Bangkok the pigeons were always white; here in Vietnam the pigeons were grey. Children surrounded me as I cross the courtyard with my offering of incense. They circled, stared and laughed. Many of them had never seen a member of my race before although the chances are



good their father or grandfather share the colour of my skin. As I entered the temple a beautiful woman with long black silky hair and kind eyes welcomed me in broken English. Taking me by the arm, she guided me through the ugly plaster mythological characters of Chinese Buddhism with their wrathful fangs, red faces and black beards. She was very proud of these statues. Up two flights of stairs and down a long dark corridor she led me to the sacred room where the Buddha sat. He too was made of plaster, painted white with red lips. A garland of yellow marigolds adorned his neck. The woman showed me how to offer up incense to the heavens and chanted prayers in Vietnamese as I prayed in English. I felt safe in this tiny, dusty, dark temple that was slowly being eroded away by the suffering world that surrounds it. I sat for an hour praying and watching women come with flowers, light their incense and go. The joy in the worn-down temple filled my soul, giving me back the faith I had lost in the golden temples of Bangkok.

Wrapped in the white hospital sheets, moving only when forced to, trying not to feel the pain, I am given messages from my friends in Canada. Surrounded by the Chinese language, enveloped in the torrid heat of the tropics, fighting a disease of a foreign land, I imagine my friends in the place where we would come together. I can see the large kitchen in the country and a big pot of soup on the large black stove being stirred with loving-kindness, I can see the sparkling white fields and the forest branches heavy with fallen snow. My friends are stamping the snow from their boots and shaking it from their hats as they enter the basement of the temple where I first learned to pray. The temple shines in my mind. I am told prayers are being given for me from this special place. The prayers give me strength.

One of the messages I receive is to imagine a garden of yellow lilies growing in my body. My dear friend took a photograph of yellow flowers that grew in the botanical gardens of Singapore and taped it to the end of my bed. Many, many hours I spend staring at the photograph, imagining the softness of the yellow petals and their gentle scent. Sometimes I can see deer and rabbits playing among the pretty flowers. The photograph always reminds me of the love my friend gives and of all the people praying for me in Canada.

At night when it is dark and I am alone and frightened, listening to the alarms screaming death and beeps becoming a steady hum as another body loses its life energy, I cultivate a garden of yellow lilies. Their green stems appear first, sprouting in heavy darkness. A leaf or two unfurls and then a bud appears. Suddenly, the lilies begin to bloom, their yellow petals lightening the darkness with joy, easing the weight of pain and sickness. The fear subsides and calm enters. Sometimes I can feel others meditating around me, their faces flash through my mind: the wizened face of an Asian nun with grey stubble for hair: a small blonde child with an angelic face. Their mantras rock my soul. Then unknown forces join me, forces I have only known briefly, forces that frighten me, forces I know I can trust. Then I recall the faces of the people I love. One by one I call them to mind, hear their voices and allow the love I feel for them to flourish. The pain, hatred and fear is washed away.

The day before I left Singapore the balding head nurse took me out for lunch. Our plates were piled high with Chinese dumplings and strawberry tarts, we told each other about our lives, trying to imagine each other living in a place where there is no pain, no screaming alarms and no death in every second. She asked me about the time she wanted to read me the Bible, "Why did you say you are a Buddhist?" I told her Buddhism makes sense to me. Still her eyes questioned me but her words were silent. I wondered if I should ask her why she is Christian. But I didn't. Asians never really believe it is possible for me to adopt a religion of their homeland, just as I never believed that Asians understand Christianity — really. Then the balding nurse made a joke, saying it is what is in the heart that counts. We both laughed.

Coming home, I feared the people who had prayed for me. I feared not being able to live up to the expectations of their prayers. I knew I must thank them, but how does one thank another for prayers? So I painted some cards and sent them off. But I will never be able to thank them enough and so I continue to pray.

Several months later, it was well into the evening, we were still sitting around the kitchen table with full bellies and the last drops of wine in our glasses when we began to talk about when I was sick. A friend told us how she had prayed. We all but one, nodded our heads in agreement, knowing the need to pray, knowing the

strength in faith and hope. Another friend told how she envied the Asians' blind devotion to greater powers as she called them.

"I couldn't pray," she said as she picked up a crumb from her plate and popped it in her mouth.

How very sad this world would be if we didn't have prayers.

*Chris Weston has travelled widely and lived intensely. Her current home is a Buddhist Centre in the north of Ontario, where she works as Administrative Assistant and Hostess.*



# Women and Spirituality — A Personal Account of Friendships that Enlighten

by Nalini Virmani

A spiritual experience is essentially one that awakens us to the fact that we are a small part of something larger such as the whole of existence itself. It is an experience of the undercurrents of consciousness; of the ever changing flow that forms the substratum of the continuum that we define as ourselves. We all come to this in our own way, for me it took the shape of unique friendships that left indelible imprints on my psyche; emotional involvements that engaged the intellect and attuned it to the spiritual essence that empowered the relationship itself, leaving me with a gnawing sense of a mysterious presence, of a continuity beyond my limited perspective. Slowly, as I matured, the pieces began to fit together and comprehension of the spiritual pattern emerged. I shall try to share glimpses of these friendships that led to my exploration of Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism.

My parents were Arya Samaji's (a branch of Hinduism), from the Punjab living first in Lahore and after Partition in New Delhi. My father, a banker, was an avant-garde non-ritualist who claimed an affinity with anglicized, independent India. His capitalistic heart and orthodox patriarchal views formed the basis of my milieu. The first breath of fresh air that accosted me was my Anglo-Indian Montessori teacher, Mohini. True to her name, which implies 'moonbeams', she showered me with unconditional love. Along

with her, her fiancé Santosh spoilt me with gifts of chocolates. We all resided on Hailey Road, in the midst of New Delhi. As I walked to school alongside my ayah Malti, I took for granted the amaltas blossoms (*Laburnum*) lining each side of the street secure in knowing that hugs and kisses awaited me in class and chocolates later in the evening. As yet I was not aware of the mysterious presence of Mohini's mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Gauba, a German lady, married into one of the leading industrialist families of the Punjab. She had founded my school 'Shivniketan' in 1938, on the lines of Rudolf Steiner (later developed into the Waldorf system). To her, education was the development of the whole person and not just mathematical and scientific skills. She exemplified the perfect mingling of Eastern and Western spirituality. But, at the age of four, I was more enamoured by Mohini and her handsome pilot-friend Santosh — the bestower of chocolates. Suddenly, when the chocolates stopped coming, I begged my parents to transfer me to the big school with the swings in the playground, where my sisters went in their smart red and white uniforms. The fact that Santosh's plane had crashed leaving Mohini devastated was too large for me to grasp; I only knew that tears were not much fun and that there were no chocolates any more. Impermanence had hit me in the belly and I ran away to the consolation of swings in a big playground. Twenty years later I was to return to the magic of Mrs. Gauba, to teach yoga in her school just prior to our immigration to Canada.

Meanwhile, life took its smooth course, we moved from Delhi to Bombay; from Convent of Jesus and Mary to St. Joseph's Convent in a suburb of Bombay called Bandra. The Roman Catholic Irish nuns in Delhi had been intimidating so the Anglo-Indian nuns in Bandra were a refreshing change. In the midst of these gentler nuns, I had my second magical encounter with unconditional love. A short while after I had settled into the new school we received a new headmistress in the person of Sister John of the Cross.

A petite lady, she won all our hearts with her endearing smile and bright, shining eyes. as she gracefully swept through the school corridors the customary atmosphere of fear changed to a benign, loving kindness that inspired the best in us. In unison we girls responded with all we had to give and soon St. Joseph's became a respite from the restrictive, stratified Indian society. Sr.

John of the Cross had the singular quality of respecting each person and relating to her in a way that made her feel very special. For the first time in years, I began to feel human again as she imbued hope in us along with the faith that all things were possible. My grades shot up to the top of the class. I blossomed in the arts, and even dreamed of a career in the future. She epitomized the love of Christ; we became aware of Christianity without really trying, for of course, she was the way she was because she was a true Christian. Our parents warmed up to her and soon she was arbitrating our domestic differences. Consequently, she encouraged me to put aside my ambitions for a career and accept my parents' decision for my early marriage in accordance with my culture. Her love helped me to survive the turmoil of adolescence.

I shall never forget the fascinating experiences of midnight mass that Christmas in 1962, when I helped paint the paper for Sr. John of the Cross to fashion the rocks for the nativity scenes in the chapel. Perhaps because it was my first experience of such an event, or because of the excellent choir, I had my first encounter with what I later understood to be a state of expanded consciousness; I felt myself float and melt into the scene around me, as I bathed in Christ's love. It still remains one of the highlights of my life and the main reason for my continuing friendship with this remarkable woman over three decades and two continents. She remains true to herself despite annulling her vows and marrying an American as she continues to win the hearts of her new family and neighbours in North Carolina. Better than my studies of the Scriptures, it was this experience of a unique relationship that enhanced my understanding of Christianity, for what else is life, if not a relationship with oneself, with others and with the universe; and is not Christ's recipe of love the best one for having a relationship?

In 1965, Shell moved my husband to Madras where we explored Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, a scenic port on the southeastern coast of India. Here we learnt of spiritual evolution through Sri Aurobindo's books on Yoga. Since my cousin resided in the ashram, as part of her family, I had an audience with the Mother, the French lady who was the spiritual head of the organization at that time. Her enigmatic smile and dynamic presence evoked in me a physical sensation of an exhilarating charge of energy. Although I did not know her intimately,



just this brief encounter directly with her endowed me with a sense of communion; I took her blessings and felt a strange calm in the months that followed. Around this time, the birth of my second child induced a tremendous contentment in me and for the first time I knew the serene peace of fulfilment.

A new job, this time in Bombay, brought me into the aura of Ma Yogshakti Saraswati who taught me Rajyoga, a discipline that prepares one for meditation. Under her guidance and upon her insistence, I began to teach her methods to others. Mataji's independent spirit and feminist views inspired me to reach out and touch other beings with my zeal for yoga. I travelled with her to Gondia, Calcutta and Benaras learning from her living example as well as my self-explorations through yoga. When we moved back to New Delhi, my path led me unwittingly to my very first teacher — Elizabeth Gauba, in whose elementary school I taught yoga. She was a supportive mentor guiding me in organizing a yoga centre for Mataji. Subsequently, as our friendship matured, I grew aware of our karmic link. The non-judgemental attitude with which Aunty Gauba dealt with her students and staff was an eye opener; it was the crux of her magnanimous personality and it forged everlasting relationships. Once you knew her, you always came back to see her again without quite knowing what drew you. It's not possible to do justice to Mrs. Elizabeth Gauba because it's impossible to encapsulate in words the intensity of her ability to empathize with others. When my fourteen year old daughter died suddenly, due to an arterio-venal malformation in her basal ganglia, Aunty's letters overflowing with love and concern for me sustained me through the darkest days of my grief in Canada. Indira Gandhi and her sons had also passed through Aunty's tutelage along with numerous Indians who lived abroad and continued to correspond with her. After drinking deeply of Aunty Gauba's friendship, we immigrated to Canada, in 1973, where I continued to teach yoga for the local Community College in Lindsay, Cobourg and Fenelon Falls.

During our stay in Delhi I was fortunate in meeting a few delightful swamis either through family or friends. One of these men was my husband's guru, Swami Gurcharandas. We Indians reserve the individual's right to choose our own Guru, so many teachers are affiliated with the same family. This particular gentleman was a favourite with the whole family. He was a gigan-

tic man whose eyes sparkled with humour. Every time he walked into our house, we drowned our concerns in laughter. Joy was his way of combatting the idiosyncrasies of life. As our friendship deepened, he led me to the study of Vedanta. His mirthful dispensation towards life had a haunting flavour that still lingers in my mind evoking happy memories of him.

Another grand influence was Swami Yogeshwarananda of Rishikesh. As a lad, he had looked up to my grandfather, Mahatma Hansraj Bhalla, a social worker who had founded the string of D.A.V. colleges in Punjab, and because of that association swamiji was particularly kind to me. He initiated me into meditation. A man of seventy-six, who looked fifty, he was tickled pink to see me perform yogasanas; apparently women of his generation did not. On one of his trips through Europe and America, the high calibre of civic sense among westerners impressed him immensely. Last I saw of him was up in his cottage in Missouri where we had availed of his loving hospitality over a late lunch. As I write this, the clarity of his mind impresses itself on me. I cannot help feeling a deep gratitude for the karmic threads that wove these enlightened beings into my life and so enriched it with their blessings. Life itself is the best teacher, but it certainly helps to meet knowledgeable guides along the way.

An avid seeker, I went out of my way to meet Swami Chinmayananda, Satya Sai Baba, and numerous other teachers across India. Each one had a special insight to offer to one who wished to see. Nothing was imposed, it was simply there for the taking, much like nature's free gifts of sunsets and flowers. At times I saw clearly and imbibed richly and then at other moments I could hardly see or hear them and would speculate with scepticism . . . receptivity being hard to sustain, since it requires a lot of faith and trust in oneself.

In 1990 I felt the need of a teacher once again. Where, in beautiful Ottawa, was I going to find one, but as always, when one is ready the teacher comes. I met a friend in the mature student's lounge at Carleton University who told me about Tarchin from New Zealand. I met Tarchin three years ago through an organization called Crystal Staff that sponsors teachers from all over the world. I chose Buddhism as one of my electives towards the under graduation degree that I am presently working on, and listened to Namgyal Rinpoche, until finally, I met Cecilie Kwiat my current

friend and teacher. Cecilie's friendship has eased the lingering pain of bereavement. She has taught me to let go, by accepting the law of 'impermanence' that governs all life. Like all authentic teachers, Cecilie weaves relationships through unconditional love that forms the practice of 'loving-kindness' in Buddhism. Her example shows us what that means, just being with her we learn through osmosis which is further enhanced by listening to her oral teachings. Being a poet, she inspires creativity in others and helps them to recognize their own voice. After a glorious summer with her this year, when asked to write this article, I found the following poem at the tip of my tongue — a gift from being in the presence of Cecilie's consciousness. Here it is, a synthesis of the three "isms" that have conditioned my psyche, namely Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism.

### *The Feminine Paradigm*

*Born to spin galaxies  
within our sphere,  
Flesh creating flesh,  
We stay attuned to the  
natural rhythms of the  
universe.*

*Born to weave patterns  
of family and home,  
We conceive early  
the catechism of impermanence;  
as our yesterday's babe,  
bounds out today,  
to build her own world.  
The continuum of our seeds  
sprouting in ever widening circles  
automatically aligns us  
to the threads of karmic ripening.*



*For we women  
are an omen  
of the innate spirituality  
permeating all existence.  
Spirituality is as natural  
a phenomena for us women  
as the creative potential  
of our womb.*

*Our cellular structure of OM (wOMen)  
is a sublime reflex of  
'coming into being and passing away'.*

*We share the ability to  
create, sustain and obliterate  
with the cosmos itself;  
Our ida and pingala  
are the two dualistic nodes  
of the universe.  
And,  
in the cave of  
our hearts  
rests the power of loving-kindness.*

*We respond to the tides  
of the Moon,  
and pulsate with the  
heat of the Sun.  
And in our dance  
of daughter, mother, and lover,  
we resonate with the  
spiritual essence itself.*

*Our wholesomeness  
is holy,  
Our letting go of our progeny  
celebrates detachment.  
Our capacity to love is our own liberation.*

*The totality  
of this evidence,  
proclaims,  
that to be a woman,  
is in essence,  
to be spiritual.  
Why else would patriarchal dominance  
exercise its fight,  
if not against  
our overwhelming Might!*

Cecilie's complete acceptance of me has helped me to accept myself. Her patience with my belligerence during morning meditations finally awakened me to the fact that there are two distinct consciousness' operating within me; a hate state that poisons my life, and a state of expanded consciousness, akin to 'loving-kindness', that bestows inner peace and harmony in and around me. This awareness has led me to quietly watch for the mind behind the mind in the flux of mental states. It is a fascinating play of karmic dispositions rippling forth as they surface endlessly. I, the conglomerate of form, feeling, perception, volition and mental states, am now free to witness the kaleidoscopic drama that unfolds as each of these aggregates change continuously. Daily, I sit in meditation, watch my breath, and accept what arises. My ability to do this is the bounty of a friendship that enlightens.

*Nalini Virmani was born in Lahore. Ms. Virmani has travelled and lived in many cultures. She is currently a student at Carleton University and lives in Ottawa with her husband and son.*

## Sunlight on the Wall

*Linda Stitt*

the very first thing that I recall  
is sunlight dancing on a wall  
and, in a while, I learned to see  
which was light and which was me.  
And then, as I began to grow  
in wisdom, I soon came to know  
that I was neither earth nor sky  
nor beast nor bush nor butterfly  
and, through my senses, I was shown  
that I was one and one alone,  
a human form, with human mind,  
given the work of humankind

— which seems to be to learn to see  
that I am rock and wind and tree,  
that I am flame and sea and bird  
and every sound I ever heard  
and every person I have met.  
I am the past and all that yet  
remains to come. The lines I drew  
erased themselves, the more I grew,  
to show my boundaries are not  
the separation I had thought.  
And I am one, but one with all  
and sunlight dancing on a wall.

*Linda Stitt is the third member of "Uncritical Mass". Her poetry is a reflection of her great sense of insight, humour and wisdom. She has published five books of poetry and has a sixth ready to go into production.*

### **Autumn Leaf Love Poem**

*Cecilie Kwiat*

Autumn leaf spiralling its fall through space:

Cloud-caught sun's embrace of earth  
catches me too, in a fantasy  
of perfect motion.

Hey folks, today I've decided to be a lover  
so I'm putting my face on everything — just as it is!

And that leaf's slow pirouette,  
stem down, in a shaft of meaning  
making a crack in traffic  
couldn't more articulately express  
the ecstatic penetration  
of love's unendingness.



Look, over there.  
My face is on that tree!  
The mask unfolds, reveals veins, arteries  
skin roughens, swells, erupts  
and in an agony of transformation  
I've done it again —  
broken the shell!

Reborn as an alien, I look into my eyes.  
What's more wonderful than a new reality?  
Ha! drunk now,  
myself a torrent of otherness

I seep through any space.  
There's myself, peering from that child's  
sleeping countenance, leap  
with soft breath from small mouth  
to invade this workman, this drunkard.

Even politicians are me, sipping the day!  
My face moves on myriad forms:  
dung on the sidewalk, dogs in the lane,  
store cleaners, starlings, streetcars.  
Oh, I'm a lover today.  
Nothing escapes me!

*Cecilie Kwiat is an ordained Buddhist Nun, mendicant and poet who demonstrates the power of a loving heart made manifest. She performs poetry with "Uncritical Mass" whenever she is not travelling the world, and performs moments of healing wherever she is.*

# Fire Woman

by Charlene Jones

I am old now and left with many days when memory seems more real than present physical life. The now is sure, solid, but what happened before takes on a luminous quality such that it appears in my mind bathed in light, and all the events and people magnetize me into weaving their places, their characters again and again. This is in spite of what I know about memory, how it plays tricks and makes that which was seem insignificant, and that which only may have been emerge with certainty.

What I have just said is true, yet I will explain to you some of the details surrounding her coming, and her leaving, and you may judge for yourself if this is the raving of an old mind, weak in its weave, or a powerful influence which alters the pattern of the whole, so that it is stronger, but irrevocably altered.

I was driving out of town; it was in August and my dear husband who partnered me for more than two decades was gone. Suddenly, a heart attack I was told, but I felt betrayed and embittered. If death had arrived early for him, he had gone to greet it with long hours at work and part-time jobs even when it was clear we did not need the money. He couldn't stop until he was stopped forever.

None of this was in my mind; I was simply driving when I noticed up the road a little way, a woman. With a large bundle at her feet, she stood by the side of the road, dressed in a colourful

skirt and large, baggy blouse and a kerchief across her head. I hadn't seen kerchiefs worn like that since the days of my youth when we all thought we might change the world and had dressed as though the chaotic event had already begun.

Still, she looked clean and tidy, so I did something I hadn't done since those early days: I stopped to pick up a hitchhiker.

She opened the door and I was aware of her large warm smile and almost black eyes. That was about all I saw, but I suddenly felt the sunshine across my shoulders. It was early evening and the sun was to my left. The sun fell into the car and spilled all over the top of my shoulders where I sat behind the wheel. She seemed to move with no ripple of air, almost as if being still and being in motion were the same thing. I dismissed this as soon as I noticed it as the imagination of a woman too long living alone.

"How far you going?" she smiled at me.

My eyes turned from hers, back to the road. "I can take you as far as the lake," I offered in tones which sounded to me more bossy and certain than was necessary. I glanced at her to see if she had heard and taken offense, but she was smiling slightly and looking straight ahead. That is, her eyes were turned to the road, but even at this angle I had a sense she was focused somewhere else, somewhere inside of herself perhaps.

"Where are you from?" I asked. Again, the words echoed with a stiff authority, awkward, unnatural.

She pointed suddenly, "Hawk!" The bird wheeled and dove for a minute, then disappeared into the sky, a single line dissolving in the blue. I turned back to the road.

"Hawks are important to me." Her words lay without strain on the air, almost like the hawk's flight, and I was aware of wanting more. I wanted her to keep talking, to say anything. On impulse, I blurted out "Would you like to stay with me for awhile?" I may have said "for a few days," or "overnight," the exact words are lost to me since her reply was so easy and so sure, as though I was a precious child who had just mastered a difficult task.

We may have spoken more. I was aware of the road and the day and what I recall is the turn off from the main road to our small laneway, with the lake on one side and a few houses on the



other. Her presence smiled. It wasn't just her face; I was aware of her whole presence smiling with pleasure at the sight of the lake.

We drove up and I parked the car. She was out and standing at the top of the steps which lead to the dock; she was gazing across the water as I reached in the back of the car for the groceries and things I had from town.

"If you like" I was stretched across the back seat, grasping at more boxes and cartons for my already full arms, "we can go down to the water and . . . I heard a quiet splash. I jerked up suddenly, banged my head against the rim of the car door, scattered boxes and things back across the seat and over the ground. With one hand on the now tender spot at the top of my head, I twisted to see what had caused the noise.

The tops of trees guard the shoreline, which dips quickly from the road down about a dozen feet or so, from intrusive eyes. I marched down the steps. I had gone about half-way before I looked up from my feet and saw her skirt and blouse in a heap on the dock. I looked out. She was careening and splashing through the water with the same ease and similar sense of joy as the hawk in the air earlier. It might help if you keep in mind that we were not, as they say, spring chickens. This was no nubile thing, arched and lean in the wet channels of the lake. This was a middle-aged woman, with definite grey in her hair, who had been hitchhiking and was now swimming, nude in broad daylight in front of my house. She hadn't even asked if it was alright.

Anger prickled inside me. It was unreasonable, I knew even then, but anger is definitely what I felt. She swam toward me and slithered up onto the dock, all dripping wet and shiny in the gold evening light.

The dock is situated in such a way that, from afternoon through to darkness, light is direct across the water. What trees there are hang above the dock on the hill and to the south of the dock, so the western sun just shines straight up with no break. In this direct evening light, she stretched her body once in the air, tall and bold, then, in one motion, crumpled up into a ball, her knees locked by her arms, her hair hanging in streamers all along her back and shoulders, creating a veil so that no impolite section of her body showed.

My anger dissolved into disappointment, and I was now shocked at myself as well. I sat beside her. She spoke to me then, of her youth around a pond and her early enchantment with nature and all things wild. I was battling internally, these feelings which switched constantly. And the most difficult feeling I can tell you now, although at that time I barely wanted to admit it to myself, was desire.

I kept circling through anger and irritation with logical thoughts like how a guest should behave and what right do middle-aged women have going hitchhiking, circling through those feelings and snuffling around in them like a dog sniffing out a bone. I wanted to light on something, anything, away from what I feared.

She moved then, as if in synchronization with my inner carping, and her hair parted, revealing the round, soft skin of her breast hanging from her chest in the way of old women: flat at first, then gaining in shape as though, through years, the body had learned exactly how much curve was necessary to get the job done, without using one iota of excess effort. The breast was beautiful to me. I was disgusted and ashamed at myself; I was embarrassed for me and for her. I was also angry with her for making me feel these things.

"Let's go into the house." the invitation was a command coming from the internal chaos. I handed her her clothes.

I hurried up the steps and gathered the groceries from the back of the car. By the time I reached the kitchen, I felt better, pushing things into their appointed spaces, creating order from the confusion of what is new.

She came in behind me and stood in the doorway to the kitchen, where I noticed with relief, she was fully clothed. I brewed some tea, prepared a tray and followed her out the back screen door, hauling these things to the garden table.

She was spread out, that is the only way I can describe it, against the lounge chair. Her whole body seemed spread out, every inch of it, in repose on the length of that metal frame and denim cushion. she looked up at me with what seemed like gratitude and I was gone again. This time, with happiness. I felt, as I lay the tea things out on the glass-topped table, I was performing a

ritual of some importance and not merely going through motions repeated frequently enough to be empty of their power. Suddenly, it was powerful there, in the garden, and her presence was the reason.

We talked, of nothing and everything. We might have spoken for several hours, or only one. I recall being all at once very, very tired. I yawned.

"I have bored you," she laughed. She laughed with her mouth wide open, and her teeth showing. She laughed with her belly working up and down and her throat making noise as though her whole body got the joke.

"Not at all," I said, stifling another yawn. "I'm just very tired, for some reason."

"Before you go off to bed, I must ask for one more favour." Her eyes were warm still, but serious now. Whatever it was was important to her and I knew before she asked, it was hers.

"May I build a fire out here?" She gestured with her left hand and arm across the small patio and rectangular lawn and I had the impression of space. I was aware of my yard as a child might be aware: conscious of the bigness of its possibilities.

"Of course," I replied, then goodnight and I left her there. On my way through the house, I prepared some things for the morning: coffee in the maker ready to drip, and croissants from the freezer. It felt festive, like a celebration, doubly so since I normally eat nothing and drink my first tea at mid-morning.

I fell or collapsed across the bed, hardly even disturbing the blankets. It was a warm night, but my casualness was a result of extreme, bone-deep fatigue. I recall the sense of tiredness was unusual, even for an old woman. It seemed, as I lay across the bed, as though some tired had been storing up for a long time within; I seemed to sense some of the moments I had crossed off my mind as being too trivial returning now to me from the ground of myself where they had been stored, cramped and unused, gathering dust and needing energy to keep in place, marching across my mind, tiny moments . . .

In this flight of fancy, I slipped into unconsciousness. I awoke with a start, light flaring across my ceiling. Fire! I leapt from bed, my first thought to gather my new friend to safety. Where was



she? I streamed out of my room and down the hall, calling her name as I fled. I turned at the kitchen door and saw a human shadow stretched across the wall, tall and commanding. The long, streaming hair, flowing back and forth as the trunk of this shadow swayed, and danced, revealed the owner. The sound of fire drew me to the backyard.

She was standing tall on the other side of huge flames. Her hair and body were streaming back and forth as she chanted some rhythmic syllables, over and over, but with enough variety that I guessed it was a language. She glanced at me as I arrived, but I seemed of so little consequence she lowered her eyes immediately and returned to her deep inner space. And here's the thing which hangs in my mind: I saw a bed of flower petals all over my lawn.

I spent hours, directly after these events, going over and over in my mind what might have caused the sighting, seeking some rational explanation. One of the freedoms which comes with age is finally recognizing it is not necessary, nor is it possible to always reduce life to logic.

I am at peace with what I saw that night: a woman dancing in a hypnotic trance, and petals, white blossoms, covering the ground of my backyard as thoroughly as a deep carpet of snow.

I sat to watch her; I soon found my eyes drooping. In the morning, I woke in the yard, a warm blanket draped over my body. I stretched and, aside from a slight stiffness from the damp of the ground, felt better than I had in years.

Eagerly, I almost ran to the backdoor and pulled it open, ready to make breakfast or eat it if she had it prepared. I was energized and ready for another day of mysterious, ordinary living. I no sooner had my foot across the threshold than I knew: she was gone. It was as distinct a feeling as though a light in the kitchen had burned out, was no longer blazing. The house was quiet, in its usual state of order and cleanliness, but she was gone. My heart dropped then, into a grief so total it overwhelmed me.

The dark and grief lasted for weeks. I wandered about the house, barely picked at my food, had no appetite for this world or anything in it. All I knew was this chasm of deep, deep grief, the shattered longing of a child for the mother it had never had, the lost and broken heart of a lover abandoned by the beloved. That was the single reality in those days and weeks.

Finally, one morning as I lay awake in the pre-dawn, waiting for the fingers of sunlight to tell me another day had to be endured, I heard a bird singing. It was a song I could not identify and, in spite of myself, I felt a curiosity. I followed the sound of the bird.

My search led me to the dock. I stood on the dock in the early morning chill, and really looked, perhaps for the first time, at the glory of dawn on the lake. And, as the sun shadowed the dock in pale blue light, in the damp cold of that autumn morning, I took off my nightclothes, entered the water and swam.

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# Finding Our Way: My Take on the World

by Joan Vinall-Cox

I was born a person who would have been destined, in previous times, to be primarily a wife and mother, but while I was growing up in the mid-twentieth century, the meaning continued draining out of all the traditions that had shaped and held the lives of the people I was born into, so I came to a different fate. The family, the community, the church, the containers that held and shaped my ancestors' existences, all continue to lose strength and meaning, to become peripheral to what is taken seriously, what is called "reality." The absolutes of a materialistic and technological economic power structure dominate the so-called 'realistic' view of the world, a view that ignores not just the apparently invisible spiritual domain, and the partially visible emotional domain, but even many aspects of the highly visible physical domain. Sometimes I feel like a lost child trying to find my way in a shapeless world . . . During this century we have seen the disappearance, in much of the world, of the extended family as a way of living, and the growth of singleness; the nuclear family, the single parent, the single person, these are the current living patterns. This century's massive shifts of population have not only mixed nationalities and races, but have created a nomadic way of life that has turned communities into accidental and temporary clusters of people with few bonds and few mutual loyalties. And the spiritual institutions, the churches, synagogues, mosques and temples, have been torn



between working towards a tolerance for otherness while struggling to prevent the loss of the numinosity that people hunger for, or maintaining a rigid fundamentalism which may provide meaning but also appears to breed intolerance, brutality and hypocrisy. And, in the secular industrialized west, we have developed "political correctness" which is, I think, the fundamentalism of secular humanism. All our containers, all the structures that we humans live inside and found our meaning within are rigidifying and dying and/or bursting apart . . .

We have lost the psychic containers that structured our living and gave it meaning. We have become conscious of the cracks in the old collective containers and can no longer live blindly, encircled by them . . .

It is a commonplace in feminist thought that the endangerment of Mother Earth, Gaia, has resulted from the claim of dominion over, and separation from, the earth that is based in Old Testament thinking and from the development, from the early Greek and Arab patriarchies onward, of science and technology. This century we in the west especially have become used to being greedy; we consume more and more. As a species and for many of us as individuals, we seem unable to let go of our addictions to what we know, intellectually, will kill us . . .

What we need, I believe, is not an escape from, or a denial of rationality and technology and all that we have learned from them, but a balancing. We, as individuals and as a species, need to become more conscious of our connectedness, our immersion in the process of life, our feminine aspect. We need to replace our dark insatiable hungers with rituals of harmony and meaning; we need new and numinous containers so we will become a responsible and androgenous species . . .

To give birth to ourselves is the paradox at the core of achieving consciousness; it is self-containment and self-renewal . . . We must become conscious of our female energy to balance our male energy so we can become an androgenous species, people who can contain themselves and produce new life within themselves. I, as a female in the late twentieth century struggling to become a conscious human and to thus contribute to the growing consciousness of my species, must give birth to myself and speak . . .

If, as many traditions tell us, the feminine is about connectedness, immersion in the life process and its implacability, intuition

and vulnerability, then we as a species need to be conscious of that in us as individuals as well as us as a whole. We know much about separateness, going outward, domination, and rationality, the masculine energies. Both male and female energies are parts of life and both can be positive or negative forces. Both can be containers that release us into life or imprison us in stasis and decay. The aspects we recognize in ourselves, we can accept and work with in a positive manner; the ones we don't see will blindside us, and destroy or cripple . . .

There are many symbolic languages available to us as ways to understand growing more conscious. We may speak of archetypes, or of trends in people and/or society. We may talk of a divinity and/or the Collective Unconscious. We may refer to science or ideology. We may use poetry or fiction.

Whatever language we use, it is clear that the old patterns, the old containers, the old holinesses have lost energy, have lost the numinous quality that allowed them to give meaning to life, and to that essential aspect of growth and change, to sacrifice . . .

What we are losing and what we so desperately need are containers for spiritual transformation, places and times where we can practice rituals that will allow us to live meaningfully. We need spiritual practices and spiritually wise people whom we can recognize and whom we can allow ourselves to learn from. But how do we find the new paths to spiritual wisdom, the new containers? . . .

Inside and outside of me, I see female archetypes that have been drained of numinosity. Inside and outside of me, I see and take part in the search for the stories hidden within the old stories, the stories that were part of the containers I grew up within, but that are now drying out, or being sealed shut, and dying. Inside me and outside of me, I am learning how to be the container and the contained, the womb and the child waiting to be born. I am learning for myself, and for those I can connect with . . .

The Goddess-force is rising again in us, revealing Herself after centuries of waiting in the underworld, rescued by empathy, coming with implacability, because it is Time . . .

And with the naming of "constant awareness and spontaneity", loving the potential, and vulnerability as strength, I know that this

Goddess-force is strong in me, though it is hard for me to say so.  
I try to reach past the language to the meaning.

## The Holy Classroom

*Open-handed,  
Eyes closed, and opened  
Like the grinning, grimacing fool*

*I sing to you  
a song*

The classroom works as a container because of the continuities and demands it provides. I know, whether as teacher or as student, that I will meet with a number of people at regular intervals, for set lengths of time, for a set period of time, but I don't know who the people will be, or how we will be together. I know, whether as student or teacher, that I will have to read and talk with others who are also obliged to read and talk about the same matters, but I don't know how that reading and talking will affect me, and them. I know I will have to write or do other tasks that will possibly permanently affect me, but I don't know in what way. So the classroom, by tradition, has patterned behaviour, ceremonies; it also can provide the space for transformations.

That the classroom is a place of ceremony and rituals should be no surprise. After all, for most of history, and still in much of the world, education is the responsibility of religion. (There is some debate about the origins of the written word, whether it was devised to facilitate business, or to worship divinity, but the oldest writings we have are hymns of praise chiselled on temple walls. And the oldest myth, of the descent of the Goddess, Inanna, is from the third millennium B.C. or before (Perera, 1981, p. 9). It makes sense, when we think of how much the worship of Divinity required the study of Divinity, that schools were developed in concert with religions.) But what makes the classroom a holy place for me, a place where I feel the Goddess-force flow through me, is the presence of eros, the "psychic energy which pertains to relatedness, to joining, to mediating" (Qualls-Corbett, 1988, p. 17). "Eros, the energy of wanting, is as much the energy source in the



pursuit of truth as it is in the motion toward pleasure, friendship, fame, or power" (Connelly, 1983, p. 236).

In the classroom, I wish to offer my students the experience they each need to become stronger readers and writers, clearer communicators. To achieve this, I must help/allow my students to become more aware of themselves. I want to connect with each of my students in quiet yet vital ways, and the tasks and rituals of my classroom are such that each student can reveal as much as she or he wants or needs that will keep the class energized for them. Schwab describes it thus:

*This rare relation comes into being when a series of transactions between (student) and (teacher) have their origin and direction given by a task in which they are jointly engaged. If the task is "real," that is, if it embodies creation of something admirable or useful to others, the experience involved becomes the most complete of which the young is capable. The feeling experienced can be atomized into a sense of the smooth flow of muscle and movement, a sense of increased stature (the child literally feels himself [sic] taller) and of increased clarity and scope of vision, hearing, touch. These sensations are felt as if they were a translation or representation of something occurring in deeper and more intrinsic levels of the child's personality. That "something" is growth of the person; the body translates this to consciousness.*

(Schwab, 1978, p. 118)

To evoke the growth that is learning, joy is an absolute need. We must "[b]e in the present [, and l]et the unconscious play" (Woodman, 1982, p. 84). We must "allow life to happen, . . . open [ourselves] to love and delight, grief and loss. Sophia is the bridge, the love that opens the body to receive the spirit" (Woodman, 1982, p. 85) and allows the student to awaken, and to transform.

In this time while most of the former containers have become mainly nostalgically or rigidly held forms holding largely rote meanings and the new containers are not yet fully coalesced and



only hazily perceived, the classroom remains one of the few “impersonal frameworks” where “innate spiritual longings” (Woodman, 1982, p. 31) can be structured. I bring my love of connectedness and spontaneity into the container of the classroom conventions and invite my students (or my teacher) to meet me here where we can both find and follow what gives us joy, what brings us to life.

I know I cannot know before another what brings this vitality, what path must be followed. I also know that “only from the presence of spirit can meaning and joy stream into all work, awe and sacrificial power into all possession — filling not to the brim but sufficiently” (Buber, 1987, p. 50). I am called to the classroom. Being in the classroom is my part of the world-shaping we are now engaged in. Here, I can take part in “the solid give-and-take of talk. The moments of relation are here, and only here, bound together by means of the element of the speech in which they are immersed. Here what confronts us has blossomed into the full reality of the **Thou**. Here alone, then, as reality that cannot be lost, are gazing and being gazed upon, knowing and being known, loving and being loved (Buber, 1987, p. 103).

In the classroom, the spirit can live and can transform us as we grope toward the meanings we must build. In the classroom, we have the container that holds our pasts and futures and, most of all, our beings.

Infused with and enfolded within these thoughts, I end my sabbatical year. Thus I leave the classrooms where I have been a student and return to the classrooms where I will be a teacher.

*May I be well happy and peaceful.*

*May you be well happy and peaceful.*

*May our families be well, happy and peaceful.*

*May our students be well, happy and peaceful.*

*May our colleagues be well, happy and peaceful.*

*May all be well, happy and peaceful.*

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# Emerging Spirituality of Women

## Asian Experience

by Sister Mary John Mananzan

### WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

**S**pirituality is not a simple concept. It is used for describing different realities which may have converging elements. The totality of the elements may differ from one understanding to another. Christians or theistic people for example may not be able to understand how non-believers could have a spirituality. And yet some of the most deeply spiritual people I have met are self-proclaimed atheists.

What then is spirituality? In Christian theology and practice, an old understanding of spirituality would more or less describe it as theology applied to daily life—to one's personal life of prayer and ascetism to be more precise.

There is however an emerging understanding of spirituality as the inner core made up of all the experiences and encounters one has made in one's life and out of which comes the motivations and inspiration and the commitment that makes one live and decide in a particular way. One might say, it is the shape in which the Holy Spirit has moulded herself into one's life. Donald Dorr expresses it thus:



*"There is a centre in me, out of which I act. Of course I do not perform all my actions out of this centre; but my most authentic and significant acts are rooted in it. When I am touched and moved at that focal point my free response represents me — and it also shapes me for the future. I may call this centre my "heart" or I might consider using a Japanese word "harah" the belly, which is seen as the centre of the present strength. This recalls the words of Jesus in John's Gospel—"out of his belly shall flow streams of living water". (Jn. 7-18).<sup>1</sup>*

This centre is partly influenced by one's genetic heritage and environment but is largely shaped by our gut-level experiences and major options in life. It is also this centre that is the focus of our "experience of God"—it is here where we allow the Holy Spirit to move us, to act in us, to assimilate the major experiences we encounter in our lives especially the new and unpredictable which might totally contradict the accumulated experiences that through the years shaped our core. This is where the phenomenon of conversion, *metanoia* may be realized. Meditation, prayer and ascetism enable the person to integrate these experiences into his/her inner core or to partially or completely revise it.

## **WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE — THE CONTEXT OF THE EMERGING SPIRITUALITY**

**A**s we said above, the gut experiences are those that shape our spirituality. Women experience many things but it is their experience as women that touch them most, both on the personal and the social level.

As women we experience regular and every day discrimination, the limiting experiences of housewives confined to the home, as society assigns them to do, the despair of the wives who are beaten but who cannot separate from their husbands, "because of the children", because of social disapproval or because of emotional and psychological dependence on their husbands. We rebel against the exploitation and discrimination and sexual harassment of our sisters who work either in the rural areas as invisible contri-

butors to agricultural production or in an urban setting as factory workers. We rebel at the continuous insult to our womanhood in the mass media, in advertisements and the more blatant exploitation of our sisters in prostitution, mail-to-order brides, etc.

But aside from these regular and day to day experiences we have our own *private hells* which we experience at crisis points of our lives as women and which each one of us could relate with poignancy and anguish and from which we emerge either triumphantly with inner liberation or with bitterness and resentment, crushed and mortally wounded in the depth of our being.

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS SPIRITUALITY

### Theological Basis of This Spirituality

**T**he emerging spirituality has grown side by side with the growth in theological understanding. The contextualization of theological thinking actually follows what has already been true in the reality that one's spirituality is shaped by one's experience, personal and social. The development in theology that has healed dualisms and dichotomies explains better the characteristics of spirituality that will be discussed later. In the history of our salvation that begins with the experience of Exodus by the people of God, the understanding of salvation that emerges is one worked out by a God of history with the people which resulted in a liberation that is total and concrete, total in the sense of the whole person, body and soul, and in the context of a social milieu and concrete in the sense of liberation from concrete evils such as injustice, slavery and exploitation and a working out of concrete blessings like land, posterity, covenant with (Yahweh?), etc. Throughout the history of salvation, this was the experience of the people of God. In the subsequent hellenization of Christianity, Platonic dualism had influenced Christian concepts resulting in an understanding of salvation that is narrowed down to a salvation from sin, hell, and death in order to go to heaven.

The emerging spirituality of women shows the characteristics of the original meaning of salvation, namely its totality and concreteness.

## **The Totality of This Spirituality**

**T**he personal and social experiences of women as well as their common struggle have shaped the particular form of spirituality that is emerging among them. This spirituality is nourished by their growing understanding and clarity of their self-image which has been obscured by the roles that have been assigned to them by a patriarchal society. It, in turn, influences their interpersonal relationships with the significant people in their lives, most especially their husbands and their relationships with men in general. This also touches the collective consciousness that is growing among them as they struggle against their exploitation and discrimination as women as well as the triumph and victory they have achieved in this struggle. It is therefore not just a vertical relationship with God but an integral spirituality that is shaped not only by prayer but by relational experiences and struggle—personal, interpersonal and societal.

## **Inner Liberation**

**T**he emerging spirituality of women is characterized by an inner liberation from the internal and external slaveries they have struggled to break. Militant women are one in the experience of this sense of liberation coming from their development in self-knowledge and self-acceptance and in their growth, in self-esteem.

## **THE EMERGING SPIRITUALITY OF ASIAN WOMEN**

### **Its Context**

**T**he spirituality emerging among Asian women grows out of the specifically Asian context of women's struggle. The statement of the women who met in the Asian Women's Consultation in Manila in November, 1985 describes this situation as follows and we quote fully:



*In all spheres of Asian society, women are dominated, dehumanized and dewomanized; they are discriminated against, exploited, harassed, sexually used, abused and viewed as inferior beings who must always subordinate themselves to the so-called male supremacy. In the home, church, law, education and media, women have been treated with bias and condescension. In Asia and all over the world, the myth of the subservient, servile Asian woman is blatantly peddled to reinforce the dominant male stereotype image.*

*Indian women still live under the shadow of a patriarchal tradition that manifests itself in violence against women, namely the dowry system, bride burning, forced sterilization and sex-determination tests. Hindu mythology which depicts woman as a seductress or the evil one, incapable of moral self-control, has helped to institutionalize these unjust practices.*

*Filipinas like many of their Asian sisters, are subjected to job discrimination and are exposed to health hazards in factories, multinational corporations and export processing zones. Because of the severe economic crisis, and with the advent of sex tourism and the presence of U.S. bases, many leave home to become migrant workers in hostile alien lands. Furthermore, many are raped, tortured, imprisoned and killed for their political beliefs.*

*In Malaysia where there is a resurgence of religious fundamentalist trends, widening economic inequalities, worsening communal relations and diminishing political freedom, women are the worst hit. In Japan, the male-oriented emperor system is still firmly established. And even as the people continue to bear the stigma of the nuclear havoc wrought upon them, Japan steadily moves into a*



*highly dangerous technological stage with its concomitant deadly hazards.*

*In Korea, people suffer from the pain of separation and division of their homeland; they live under a government pre-occupied with national security and militarism, while remaining in the grip of the Confucian family law which makes men absolute masters in all aspects of life.*

*Oppression of women cuts across class, caste, creed, race, profession and age. But even among women there is division and misunderstanding because of differences in perceptions.*

*Living in the Third World, we see and experience double oppression from the all-pervading patriarchal system deeply ingrained in our societies, aggravated by the unjust structures which have been perpetrated by the rich and the powerful in collusion with the foreign forces that dominate us.<sup>2</sup>*

In the midst of this political, economic and cultural turmoil, strong people's movements are emerging, with the women contributing great force and militancy to these movements. Women's growing awareness indeed heralds new life and liberation from the shackles that have long stifled them.

### **Its Manifestations**

**T**his situation has caused Asian women to be committed to the struggle of the people in the economic, political and cultural movements of liberation which they see as a necessary though not sufficient condition for their own liberation. As they go through the crucible of suffering, they experience significant changes in their understanding and practice of religion and in the manifestation of their religiosity.

The Christians among them have begun questioning the traditional teachings of the church especially those that justify the

subordination of women. They are slowly getting a clearer self-image and are experiencing a process of inner liberation from the abiding guilt feelings induced by religious doctrines and ethical teachings of the traditional church. The long suffering doormat model of a "good wife" is no longer tenable. They are less and less inclined to pattern their life after the impossible model of virgin-mother, of a domesticating Mary-cult imposed by foreign missionaries. They are questioning the interpretation of St. Paul's "wives obey your husbands" when it comes to the use of their body in the frequency of pregnancy or in submitting to their husbands every time he claims his marital rights. Although the Catholic Church has never budged from its insistence on the natural method of birth control, about 90% of Catholic women quietly contravene the law and use other forms of contraceptives and not a few have had themselves ligated after the birth of three or four children.

Among middle-class women, who more than their lower-class sisters, are devastated by broken relationships with men, there has been an acceptance of single parenthood, women learning to face life alone, conquering their emotional and psychological dependency, and finding a meaning in life apart from their estranged male partners.

The growing organization of women among the urban poor and labour unions has resulted in a sense of sisterly solidarity that strengthens the women in their struggle against the discrimination and oppression they experience both in their homes and in their work places.

The women of Asia have also rediscovered their history and are resurrecting the women-leaders, heroines and saints of their particular tradition as sources of co-operation and strength for their struggle. The Filipinos enshrine a Princess Urduja and Gabriela Silang, the Indians Mira Bai, Panditta Rama Bai, etc. Realizing that the Bible, in spite of all re-interpretations, remains a book written in a patriarchal society, Asian women are delving into their own traditions, myths and legends to provide them with the insights, values, and inspiration in their effort towards the full flowering of their womanhood.

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE WOMEN'S STRUGGLE TO CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

**T**he emerging form of consciousness and religiosity that has been brought about by the women's movement cannot but influence spirituality in general.

The release of creative energy and new insights has resulted in a refocusing of the different elements of spirituality which tends to converge in a certain trend that draws its vitality from *creation* as contrasted from the traditional spirituality that focused on the Fall and Redemption. Matthew Fox's contrast of these two forms of spirituality which could be entitled feminist and patriarchal is worthy to be seriously considered.

FEMINIST  
CREATION CENTRED

PATRIARCHAL CENTRE  
ON FALL/REDEMPTION

Image of God/Christ

God as Mother — God as  
Child as well as Father

God as Father

Starting point — Dabbar-  
God's creative energy

Starting point — sin

Cosmic Christ

No cosmic Christ — stops  
with historical and metaphys-  
ical

Emphasis on Jesus as  
prophet artist and Son of  
God who calls others to their  
divinity Trinitarian Panenthe-  
istic

Emphasis on Jesus as Son of  
God but not Jesus as  
prophet

Creator, God, prophet Son  
of God and Holy Spirit as  
divine transformer

Underdeveloped theology of  
Creator and of the Holy  
Spirit

Image of Human Being

Human-royal person who can  
choose to create or destroy

Human — as sinful

dialectical — (soul and body  
• relationship)  
soul loves body  
Body in the soul to enlarge  
soul

dualistic — soul makes war  
with the body  
Body is prisoner of soul

Faith

Is trust

openness to radically new

Faith-thinking as assent



i.e.imagination/sentiment

Security of being a law-abiding citizen

### Salvation and Process of Salvation

Healing of the people of  
God and Cosmos  
Build up Kingdom/Queen-  
dom

Personal Salvation  
Build up Church

Kingdom — Cosmos and  
Creation

Kingdom — Church

Total and Concrete

\*Abstract and purely spiritual

Struggle to make justice of  
injustice and to balance the  
cosmos

Struggle to clean one's con-  
sciousness

Prophetic — critical of status  
quo

Political — supportive of  
status quo

External life — now and  
then not yet

External life — future

Death — natural event  
towards rebirth

Death — wages of sin<sup>3</sup>

### Holiness and Sanctity Nature & Process

Cosmic hospitality

Quest of perfection

Ecological and cosmic

Ecological

Hospitality to all of being

Purity from the world

Discipline to birthing

Mortification of the body

Eros, celebration of passion

Control of passion

Imperfection, integral to nature and growth

Keep soul wet so that it grows, expands and stays green (Hildegard Echart)

Emphasizes original blessing

Vertical and horizontal circular

Humility—befriend one's earthiness (humus)

letting go—surrender

Hopeful

For the many oriented for powerless and oppressed

Spiritual journey:

via positiva

via negativa

via creativa

via transformativa

Emphasize resurrection — Easter

Emphasize creativity/beauty (obedience to the image of God or so)

Emphasizes justice

Return to past—state of perfection and innocence

Keep soul clean

Emphasizes original sin

Vertical

Humility—despise yourself

control

pessimistic

Individualistic/elitist for those in power

Spiritual journey:

purgation

elimination

Union

Emphasizes cross—Good Friday

Emphasizes obedience to external authority/duty

Emphasizes righteousness

A tentative reflection of the contrast between these two types of spirituality shows that the emerging one we have appropriated

as "feminist" has an image of God that takes in both masculine and feminine characteristics and of a God that can be recognized not only by a Western mentality but by the Oriental mind. It is a God that unites—not a God that divides people into creedal dogmas. It has a very liberating portrait of Jesus who is seen as a prophet and an artist. In its image of the human being it has transcended the dualistic body and soul relationship and has optimistic view of the possibilities of personhood. Faith is not a security in being saved because of legalistic obedience but is an exciting dimension of radical openness. Salvation has a communal historical and cosmic dimension and is integral and total. It is a spirituality that is joyful rather than austere, active rather than passive, expansive rather than limiting. It celebrates rather than fasts, it surrenders rather than controls. It is an Easter rather than a Good Friday spirituality. It is creative rather than conservative.

## CONCLUSION

**S**pirituality is a process. It is not achieved once and for all. It does not become congealed. It is not even a smooth continuous growth. There can be retrogression or quantum leaps. It has peaks and abysses. It has its agonies and ecstasies.

The emerging spirituality of women promises to be vibrant, liberating and colourful. Its direction and tendencies seem to open up to greater possibilities of life and freedom and therefore to more and more opportunities to be truly, intensely and wholly alive!

*Sister Mary John Manazan is the founder of Gabriela. She lives in the Philippines.*

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Donald Dorr, *Spirituality—Justice* Quezon City: Claretian Publication, 1985 p. 20.
- <sup>2</sup> *Statement of the Asian Women's Consultation in "Voices from the Third World", Vol. VIII No. 2. December, 1985, pp. 32-33.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Matthew Fox—xeroxed handout. The list has been reorganized by the author of the article grouping related concepts under a heading and adding other concepts to the list (marked with asterisk).*

# Witchcraft: Ancient European Religion

by Liz Moes

One Saturday afternoon, I got a call from a woman inviting me to explain something about my religion, Wicca<sup>1</sup>, in a women's journal. Charlene Jones had heard me speak about the Wiccan tradition on CIUT.FM, University of Toronto's community radio station and wanted to present some of these ideas to the readers of *Tiger Lily*. This interview is a result of our subsequent meeting.

I hasten to avow that in this article I am not speaking as any kind of official representative of Wicca or as a consummate authority, but as a woman who has become personally involved with this religion. I am speaking of MY experience and understanding, which should not be taken to be the doctrinal position of all Witches. Wicca is essentially anarchistic and its adherents resist attempts to unify and govern it.

In order to shape the direction of inquiry, Charlene posed the questions while I provided (somewhat rambling) answers. However, we wanted to do something a little different from the standard interview so to assist Charlene in the job of getting the article produced and to assure complete clarity of communication between reader and interviewee, I accepted the task of writing the interview myself. Charlene's questions revolved around the history and philosophy of Wicca, the ritual practices and my own personal religious experience. What follows is a self-edited, revised and paraphrased transcript of our conversation.



It is Sunday afternoon in my kitchen as we chat over steaming cups of Earl Grey tea. Charlene is telling me about Tiger Lily and the particular readership it addresses: women of colour and multi-cultural backgrounds who live in Canada. I comment on the irony that both she and I are white, and that Wicca could really be called a "white" religion because it originated in the countries of Northern Europe and Scandinavia. Well, in deference to the aims of the journal, all I can say is if alienation and discrimination are the issues, we Witches have had our share.

*Yeah, White Folks Was Wild Once Too!*

*We'd get a wild tattoo  
And paint our faces blue  
If we smelled some game  
We knew just what to do  
And someone always dug  
Where the medicine grew  
We had our own kind of music and our rituals too*

*Yeah, white folks was wild once too!*

Charlene asked me to refer to the history of Wicca.

Well, in terms of what we know for sure, it's really hard to say because Wicca is an oral tradition, and for eons the people who practised it were not literate. This is a double bind in that firstly, they did not want to write things down because some of it is secret, and secondly, they did not write things down because there was no choice. So what do we know for sure? I think there is evidence to trace elements of modern Wicca to folk traditions of at least 1,000 B.C. But to prove it, I would need a lot of help from folklorists and archaeologists.

The whole issue of historical accuracy is a thorny one because some people will make extravagant claims about the accuracy and the age of symbols and ritual acts while other people will be totally cynical and say, 'Aw, its just been made up in the last twenty years. You guys don't know what you're talking about. You might be plugging into some archetypal symbols, but that's all'.

*Charlene asserted that she was more interested in the concept that there was a time when woman was worshipped as the fertility Goddess, when tens of thousands of female figurines were made and later found throughout Europe. I agreed that such an idea is both appealing and plausible but that conservative archaeologists (some of them women) still don't like to commit themselves to whether the figurines are actually goddesses!*

I think to be too academically cautious about history is to miss out on a lot. Archaeologists are scientists (a type of religion!), devoted to the tradition that nothing can be said for sure unless it can be documented "irrefutably". Well, we should know by now that nothing about the past can be really known *for sure*. There is a lot of hypothesis and analogy and reconstruction and 20/20 hindsight, but that is not the same as Truth of What Really Happened. Witches, as I will explain later, know that time and space are relative.

The earliest goddess-like artifacts we have are 40,000 years old but the religion would have started before that. From that period up to the Mesolithic Period (7,000 ago) the artifacts are very focused on feminine power and then it starts to change. It all takes place gradually and appears to evolve into something more masculine-oriented by the time we see city-states: central government, large scale warfare and literacy. Ancient Sumer and Egypt were civilisations with patriarchal political and social control. Goddess religion at this point has combined with the newer acknowledgement of male power and various gods become represented in art and artifact, although the Goddess is the prime mover. The one civilisation of which we have record and which is thought to have been fully matriarchal is the Minoan civilisation. That's probably because it was on an island and so was able to preserve its culture longer.

I think a pretty good working hypothesis is that the relationships of male and female power is a pan-global thing which is politically determined by the technology of the time. Thus, when the values of life and all that that entails: birth, children, food, survival — Goddess values — is at its highest, the Mother is worshipped. But as populations grow and survival becomes easier,

values shift to the holder of *social* power and the Father is worshipped. The primary role of the god is to assert political power. Witness Yahweh, Zeus, Marduk, Osiris, Caesar, Odin. Because it is political (law-making) it is warmongering. Just think of the myths associated with these gods. In contrast, the Goddess power centres around the magic of life.

You can see so many of the same patterns in Native North American cultures as there were in Pagan Europe. They all celebrated slightly differently, but the main thrust is the same: mother earth, father sky, the four seasons, the power of animals, the four directions, the circle, tree powers, all powers of nature, the moon, the sun and the stars . . . In the Native tradition, the Moon is their Grandmother and in Wicca she is the ancient ruler of the reproductive cycle. The sea and the earth is also female, the ocean being the primal source of life, and the earth producing all our bounty but the sky and the sun later become male.

Why? The Goddess is the power to bring things into being, into the material plane, the power of manifest existence. Anything like air, wind, rain, sunlight, or heat is male according to the following logic. The God's power is unmanifest potentiality, which is totally diffuse and chaotic (the sun) until it is focused in material form (the earth) which is what the Goddess provides. All the religions which are God-oriented are focused on the unmanifest, *what's not here*. For example, the polarity of spirit and flesh in the discovery of lust in Eden, or the Buddhist and Hindu round of karmic reincarnation. Anything that's incarnate is less than perfect; it has to have fallen in some way; it has to have been degraded in some way.

That leads to the concept that an ideal force "out there" combines with a degraded form "right here" and that is a degradation. What is here is imperfect, what is not here is what is perfect. (Talk about grass growing greener . . . ) This of course has some pretty negative consequences for women: the feminine being equated with birth, the body, the earth, and matter which is judged negatively as not being pure spirit. In Goddess-centred religion the body is judged as being magical, imbued with spirit, a gift which is a perfect harmony of elements and part of the whole magical stream of life itself, including whatever so-called flaws they have . . .



The Hindu and Buddhist traditions are similar to Wicca in viewing time as cyclical with everything moving in an endless cycle of creation and destruction, of evolution and devolution. But these religions see the devolution as a negative phase so they aspire to opt out of the cycle altogether. Wicca *celebrates the cycle* as perfect in itself. And this impacts on our view of history: time is not linear it is cyclical, place cannot be isolated but is completely interconnected. Therefore, Time and Space are relative — and magic happens.

*Then Charlene commented that the concept of the preservation of what is ideal leads to valuing materials which are long lasting in time. This seemed to her to be only half of the circle, rather than saying the teepee goes up one day and it comes down the next because that is part of the natural way. I definitely agreed that the teepee philosophy comes from just such a point of view.*

Once again, the attitude of seeing the earth as an inanimate, inferior object available for our domination leads to greed and disrespect. When the earth is seen as our sacred Mother who gives us life, our use of her children — plants, animals, elements—is coloured by love and reverence.

It's a beautiful moral concept that the teepee doesn't stay anywhere long enough to harm the grass, but I don't think that means we shouldn't have skyscrapers. Like Prometheus we have this technology, this know-how which we can't NOT use, we can't un-know it. The only way of coping properly is to use it with wisdom and be balanced about it. We have to recognize our power and take responsibility for it. For example, don't focus all the cement in Southern Ontario. Try to be wise with the places we put it.

Wisdom is a moral question: what is good and what is evil? For Wiccans, evil is the *human loss of balance and abuse of power*. We do not see moral values of good and evil in the gods themselves; the gods are the personifications of natural powers. Humans who manipulate this power do so at their own risk and at the risk of throwing the natural balance out of harmony. Meddling with the divine power of the gods has consequences — and mis-



management has negative consequences! There's very little balance in the use of our technological power and *that* is evil in the Wiccan tradition. It is human-originated evil (not divine natural) evil.

*Well, that's my take on the history and philosophy of Goddess worship and Wicca in a nutshell. Now that you have an idea of where Witches are coming from you may want to know what we actually DO!*

It is correct to think of Wicca, or Witchcraft, as a cult. It is defined in Collins' English Dictionary as follows: "Cult: 1. a specific system of religious worship, esp. with reference to its rites and deity . . . 3. a group having an exclusive ideology and ritual practice centred on sacred symbols, esp. one characterised by lack of organizational structure."

*Well, so what DO Witches do?*

Witches either get together in a group called a coven or find space to be alone and celebrate the eight (seasonal) sabbaths of the year and the thirteen moons. The seasonal festivals have mystical truths about the meaning of life. Each take a different view of the circle of the evolution and devolution of the solar year and respect and honour it. Even the festival of death is a very sacred time: the sabbath Samhain, commonly known as Hallowe'en, which is our New Year. When you celebrate the moons you connect with the power of flux and reflux on a monthly or even weekly basis, and how that is connected with the meaning of life, as we understand it.

The ritual is started by casting a circle. You create a sacred space by the fact that you describe it. It can be anywhere you are standing, you being at the centre of it. (That goes along with some pagan traditions which hold the tree as the centre of the world, the *Axis Mundi*. In this case, you are the tree.) Anywhere you are is sacred because you are at the centre of the world, you are the manifestation of the Goddess and God, you are spirit and flesh totally intermingled. Anywhere you are is the centre of the universe because you are the microcosm of the universe.

You give yourself a blessing, a cleansing to sanctify yourself, you honour the four directions and then you call to the Goddess and God and celebrate in any way you deem appropriate. That is the part that really changes from circle to circle and coven to coven. Ultimately, rituals are based on mythology.

For instance, the winter solstice is one of our sabbaths. Yule celebrates the time when the sun reaches the shortest day and from there on, daylight increases. It is a celebration that the wheel is turning again toward the creative side of the cycle: the dark cold nights ahead are an illusion because summer's sun will return. This is the birth of the year, and naturally, the Goddess is the mother. Hence, the Christian image of mother and child echoes an earlier myth of Mother Earth and her Son/Sun.

There is a tree involved in Yule, but how we decorate it and how we behave around the tree differs from one place to another. In Germany the "Christmas" tree began as a Yule tree; they'd decorate the tree with fruits and nuts and lighted with candles and people would dance around it. It wouldn't originally be cut down and brought in the house but decorated outside in the woods as a celebration to show the plants and animals that the sun would be coming back. This is a symbol that growth will come again and summer will return.

But because it is also a solar festival there would also be a fire celebration. You'd burn a log and light the hearth, and quite often they would actually set the tree on fire (according to Fraser). These themes are prevalent throughout northern Europe. As we see, this tradition is being practiced right down to the twentieth century, but the symbolism is largely forgotten. The so-called common folk were not consciously practicing a religion but following community traditions. For example, in the fields at Lammas Time, which is the first harvest of the summer, you would make corn dollies and put them at the four corners of the field. These are things that farmers had continued to do although they had no idea it was connected to Wicca or what the religious symbolism behind it is. In fact, the priesthood and practice of the Old Religion was almost completely eradicated by the Burning Times.

*Charlene asked me, innocently enough, "Is the corn significant in Wicca?"*

Asking that question is like asking what is the cross in Christianity! There is such rich symbolism throughout the whole thing. And that's another important part of what Witches do that hinges upon another issue: symbolism v. literacy. The whole pagan tradition throughout the world is communicated through symbolic imagery: acting, sounding, smelling, tasting. It is sensual, symbolic and open to intuitive interpretation.

Although Christianity also uses symbolism, the focus is much more on literary symbolism, not the symbolism of natural phenomena and ritual acts. The whole religion is based on interpretation of the "word": the sacred writings which are the written revelations of the word of the god. That is where adherents find their strength. Paganism is so anarchistic because for us the revealed truth is in the world in front of you, not in what someone says it is!

When your holy media are the earth, the sky, and the elements, anyone can participate intimately at any time. If the religion requires intervention by humans (such as education, priesthood, location) many are excluded, or included only at a distance. In this way religion becomes a political tool.

Literacy enabled the church to control political authority through the elite classes and enforce liturgical dogma through the Pope. And all of this was backed up with weapons. As a result of being literary, Christianity became the dominant religion of the Holy Roman Empire. By contrast, Wicca was practiced by the illiterate, politically powerless, defenceless "heathens" (or people of the heath).

*How ripe for scapegoating during the Black Plague of the 13th century! Oddly enough, we didn't even get into a discussion of the Burning Times (the tragedy, not the movie) that usually comes up when people want to know about Witchcraft. So we passed on to the organization of Wicca.*

The one thing that hasn't been explained so far is that in addition to being an oral tradition, Goddess worship is also a mystery tradition. As such, ritual practice is kept secret for initiates only. The idea is that as mysteries of life are revealed to you through ritual you understand them deeply, psychologically,



spiritually. This can only be achieved in the conditions of religious ritual — conditions which cannot be shared through literature. That is why not much detail can be revealed in print (and why so little is publicly known about Goddess worship and Witchcraft). However, I can give an outline.

I am an Alexandrian Witch; others are Gardnerians. There's a Fairy and a Dianic neo-Wiccan cult. We all follow a certain liturgy which will be passed down from one coven to the next and you are initiated into a certain ritual that is common to all of those. So one Alexandrian can walk into another Alexandrian circle and will not be surprised by anything that goes on, whereas a Gardnerian may say "Oh, we don't do it that way, the colours of our candles are such and such . . ." and we all have a reason for having things the way we do. There are certain patterns that follow a definite procedure and the extent to which you ascribe to a particular type of Wicca will affect the similarities and differences of ritual practice.

The ways a person gets initiated are two. Either they join a coven or perform a self-initiation. If they join a coven it's quite a procedure. Far from being the kind of cult that solicits members, Wiccans require members to demonstrate the intensity of their will to follow this often difficult path. Covens are intimate places of worship and the bonding that occurs between members is strong. Any new person's energy will alter that group mind and so care is taken in the choosing.

The other way is to research as much as possible about Wiccan ritual, whether through books, teachers, or your own psychic intuition and then write your own ritual. Either way, initiation is a promise to love and honour and hold in balance the mysterious divine forces. It is admitting that we, as humans, hold enormous power, and we promise to use it with wisdom.

There are three degrees in an Alexandrian Wiccan coven. First you are initiated as a Neophyte, which lasts for a year and a day. You are sworn to secrecy around whatever you have learned in that year. If you find during that period that it's not for you then you leave in "perfect love and perfect trust". If all continues positively, you would be eligible to study for the first Priestess degree. Such degree is granted when the postulant has learned everything required of that level. There are two more degrees after that, cul-



minating in the third Degree High Priestess. As such, Wicca is a cult of priesthood.

"Orthodox" Wicca prides its history and roots. Alexandrian Wicca, was formed by Alex Saunders who was initiated by his grandmother who had a lineage going back still further. (It's named after him because he did a lot to bring Witchcraft to the public attention.) So it's very generational, lineage-oriented. For Alexandrians and Gardnerians, this is important. We are conservative in that we like to preserve customs just as they were given to us, according to the convention of oral tradition. This is not to say that there is any such thing as a "pure" ritual because we do add to older customs but that teachings are passed down by word of mouth, and if you change them, they may become lost.

By contrast, Neo-Paganism is by definition free-spirited and eclectic. It borrows heavily from Wicca but it is quite different. It is often self-originated, and doesn't claim connection with an established tradition. Neo-Pagans freely adopt whatever ancient Pagan customs they like. I don't think that it's wrong if it's done with delicacy, restraint, synthesis and, of course, balance. However, I do object to lifting rituals wholesale from other religions, because to me it shows a lack of respect for the integrity of that culture which has been balanced and harmonized by one group mind for many ages. I think it is quite arrogant to "mix and match" from a variety of cultures as the mood suits you. The practice of ritual is not a joke and should not be entered into lightly and fashionably.

Also, because Witches take ritual seriously, we don't just invite our friends from next door and say "c'mon over". We'd consult with the Priestess and if she allowed the person to come, she would change the ritual so it would be okay for the uninitiated to participate. It's not that we are elitists who want power over newcomers but that there's an awful lot of sharing of personal energy that a newcomer couldn't cope with. This is where I get critical of Neo-Pagans who will just invite anybody, including perfect strangers, into a circle. People who are not ready for a very different spiritual experience can have breakdowns of all kinds from the mild to the serious. They can't handle some of the images that are called up or some of the energy that goes around.

Conversely, Neo-Pagans have criticized ancestral Witches as being hierarchical and dogmatic for insisting on discipline, secrecy

and tradition. In fact, we are being cautious and respectful. For example, I've been to more Pagan circles where people do not respect the sacred space because they don't really understand it. They walk in and out of a circle, disregarding its sanctity and breaking open its integrity, leave them standing all weekend long — meanwhile, spirits are tripping over them on the astral plane! I think the Neo-Pagan movement is so popular right now because people see it as a completely uninhibited peace-love-groovy religion which has no structure or discipline and everything is made of love and light. Witches tend to say, 'hey, wait a minute — not everything is roses and sunshine. The universe has laws and we have laws. There are also all kinds of negative energies out there'. If you deny that, you are closing your eyes to half the circle again.

*At some point we talked about taking time out of the hectic sphere of life to concentrate on Wicca, which I said I would love to do but realized that it does not really fit in with the whole philosophy — that the pressures of life cannot be escaped but must be harmonized while you're living it. Then Charlene mentioned Buddhist meditation weekend retreats where, for instance you could go and explore "calm", and she wondered if we had anything like that.*

There are tons of Pagan nature retreats and festivals which have all kinds of workshops to explore many aspects of spirituality. They are really wonderful social events, but again, as far as I'm concerned, the real work takes place in the coven.

I may be sounding cranky here, but another thing that I consider quite bogus and foolish and a rip-off are these "weekend workshops" which, for a fairly hefty fee, introduce newcomers to "shamanistic ecstasy". This is neither legitimate, advisable nor possible. A shaman is a spirit healer whose *entire life* is devoted to and consists in the practice of mind states that no "cowan" can ever achieve. I feel the claims made by these "shamans" are an insult to true shamans (and I do not claim to be one!). If you are looking for traditional Craft teachings you will know you've found

the right people if they don't ask for money. We don't want your money; we ask for your commitment. If you are not prepared to commit to serious study (and that would be more than one weekend!), we would not be prepared to share our traditions.

*Charlene added that in Buddhism you can go in for several months at a time and there is a whole process where you would work out with your teacher who would guide you through the meditation. And in that case, because it's extremely intensive, it is recommended that you have a very knowledgeable teacher with you, because you can encounter states of mind that are less wholesome. The teacher is there to help you in that aspect, plus to help you strengthen your wholesome parts and keep guiding you toward the wholesome in your own being.*

That's what happens in a coven. You have that relationship with the teachers in a coven and there is more than one teacher in a coven. Anybody who is High Priesthood will fill that role and guide the ones who haven't been there yet. But the coven would not create a space where you would go away for months at a time. You be focused on a particular exercise which might take a couple of months, but you wouldn't go away. You'd work on it within your own life.

*Charlene asked if there are any mendicants in Wicca.*

No. It's very local. There are individuals who we call solitaires, people who work on their own, and so if you ran into one, you might invite them into your circle. But usually they are really devoted to working alone. If an elder of another coven or a solitaire were to come to our coven to visit we would welcome any teachings they would like to share. We have friends from the States and different parts of Canada who will come and visit and show us some techniques or whatever. On the other hand, you might meet someone who would like to take you on as a student, but the impetus would be on the seeker to find the teacher and to ask the questions. There is no way ever a witch will come along



and proselytize or offer. You have to ask. More than once. Like, you can't just say, "Hey, I was thinking about this . . ." and expect the teacher to say, "Oh, okay, be here at 3 and I'll tell you everything".

*Charlene: Is there a network of Witches and of sisters and brothers who are involved in Wicca in North America?*

Oh, yeah, there are lots of newsletters, but that kind of thing is largely social. The teachings are really done on a very local basis. Covens are little nuclei and actually, traditionally, one coven should be separated from another by thirteen leagues. So it's a little bit of a political entity that had jurisdiction over a certain area. But that was a long time ago. There may be covens right next door to me that I know nothing about.

*Is there a connection between Wicca and the Druids?*

Well, I think in the past this was true, but the Druids are also practicing a mystery tradition, and since I've not been initiated, I can't answer that satisfactorily.

*What led you to the Wiccan Tradition?*

My father's an atheist, my mother was Anglican and gave it up when she married my father. She made me read the Bible for literary reasons, so I come from a sort of washed-out Christian background. I was searching for a religion, wanted to have that aspect of myself satisfied even when I was a kid. I begged to go to the United Church with my best friend. The thing I liked best was being able to wear a hat and gloves and look at the stained glass . . . I liked Jesus, thought he was great, but Jehovah bugged me something fierce. He was so arrogant and crabby, he really bugged me. Jesus was so friendly and forgiving and cool, but it seemed to me that God was always having a fit at the drop of a hat and being so unfair and miserable. The story of Isaac and Abraham really annoyed me. Why he had to test Abraham, if he



didn't know well enough, then that was a cruel thing, and I just thought God was sadistic. And then he turned around and did it again to Jesus! I was thinking this in Grade One.

Small children have a clear sense of justice, and to me that was totally unjust. I don't think I had to get smarter to understand the "higher justice", which is usually what people try to argue when they are talking about the story of Job or Abraham. That you're just not old enough to understand the depth of it. But I think I understand it quite well and I think Christians have sold out to some really bizarre, twisted sense of justice. So I didn't continue in the Church.

I was always reading ghost stories and anything to do with the occult or fantasy stories like the Hobbit, that sort of thing. I was always reading astrology so my mother got me a pack of Tarot cards. It was my thirteenth birthday.

Thirteen is often a turning point for people because it is such an interesting time. You're entering puberty, getting your menses, entering adulthood. It's just amazing how many people you talk to who got turned onto Craft at thirteen. It's interesting that it's the number thirteen. Thirteen is really rich: it has a pan-cultural significance. In Tarot cards, the number thirteen is the card of Death, and there are thirteen moons in a year, Jesus had thirteen at the last supper, then you've got Robin Hood and the twelve merry men, Buddha and his twelve followers . . .

Anyway, I got the cards and I thought "Oh, great, I can read my future!" Seventy-eight cards later . . . I was overwhelmed at how many concepts there were to remember, how they talk to each other, how they mean different things in different places, upside down and backwards! By the time I got to University, I had read a lot of Tarot books and I decided to take a religion course because I thought, "I just have a couple of questions I'd like answered" . . . which of course led to more questions and ultimately a major in religious studies. So there I was at U. of T. checking out different religions and rejecting one after another when my friend and I decided to go to the psychic fair at the CNE and I found a group at a booth that was offering Tarot lessons. As it turned out these people were into Craft and I found out for the first time that there were real Witches in Toronto. In fact there

was a whole religion with tons of people practicing all over North America and that it was kept secret because it is so misunderstood.

I can tell you I was thrilled! It felt like a lot of puzzle pieces were all falling into place at once and I felt I'd come home. At last I could place myself in the universe and know I felt secure and right. And my whole life shifted gear out of the doldrums and into a much more dynamic, creative fulfilling time. The man of my dreams appeared, like magic, one day. Frankly, I've lived happily ever after . . .

*Forget about the Mau-Mau  
Forget about the Sioux  
We were homesteaders back when  
The glaciers withdrew  
And where our chiefs lay buried  
everybody knew  
We had a feel for nature  
and a sense of what was true*

***Yeah, White Folks Was Wild Once Too!***

## **What is Wicca**

### **Origins**

Wicca is an ancient, nature-based religion in the oral mystery tradition which celebrates the cycles of life. It appears to have developed from our earliest religious ideas because palaeolithic caves and megalithic places of Europe show evidence of similar traditions as those in use today. During all those centuries Wicca continued as a grass-roots religion, practiced by the peasant folk. (The word 'peasant' has the same root word as 'pagan' and originally meant 'people of the earth'. Witches use the word 'pagan' to describe beliefs and attitudes that are similar to, if not identical with Wicca.)

## Persecution

When Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the Church held that it was the one true religion and that no other religion should be tolerated. Northern European countries followed suit soon afterward (France, fifth century; Britain, sixth century; Germany, eighth century). One method of conversion was to superimpose Christian beliefs over Pagan ones. Over the years, Christianity transformed a number of Wiccan Sabbaths such as Hallowe'en (All Souls Eve), Yule (Christmas), Imbolc (Candlemas), Eostre (Easter) and Lethe (St. Jean Baptiste), and built churches directly on top of sacred Pagan sites.

But by the thirteenth century, the Pagan people still clung to their old ways despite this form of persuasion. The Church believed Paganism was evil and should be stamped out once and for all — by force. The Pope mounted an enormously effective pogrom against the Witches who guarded the Pagan traditions. And so began “the Burning Times” — the Witches’ holocaust.

When Witches were persecuted in the 13th–16th centuries they were forced underground so that their practices became shrouded in mystery. Devotees suffered torture, hanging and burning if discovered. This means that only bits and pieces of our tradition have survived in public knowledge and that is coloured by negative propaganda. Modern-day practitioners still cautiously guard their secrets.

## Purpose

The purpose of Wiccan religion is to celebrate balance, love and the cycles of life seen in the turning of the year: birth, growth, maturity, death and renewal. This we do through ritual: a symbolic enactment of the forces of the universe. The goal is to live one’s life to the fullest potential, to be fully aware here and now, on this plane, at this time, in this body. The incarnate existence is sacred and more important to us *now* than any past or future lives. We believe we are masters of our fate if we choose; we dare to live our lives to the optimum and break out of limitations and destructive habits or circumstances.



## Ethos

Witches believe the universe is governed by one divine principle that manifests itself into opposites symbolized as male and female aspects which we call the God and Goddess. These aspects are like the yin yang of the Tao, in that they pervade the entire universe. The female aspect is seen in the fruitful earth and in the moon, the male aspect is seen in the sun and the rain/sky. The Goddess represents fecundity while the God represents virility. Attention is paid to the manifestation of these principles rather than the Source itself because It is too ineffable to be practical for daily reference, although it is acknowledged in all we do.

We worship a loving balance between these two essential forces and the magic of life that they produce. In contrast to some present and past religious societies, we are not intolerant about sex, which we see as a deeply sacred act of love and balance. Our motto for happiness is: 'flags, flax, fodder and frig' (housing, clothing, food and love/sex — Friga is a Goddess of love).

We believe therefore, the universe is beneficent — it leans toward love and life (with death a necessary part of that cycle), unless it is perverted or twisted by negative circumstances into hate and destruction. For example, when beings are loved, they respond in kind. When they are hated, they become twisted and perverted. Compare a friendly puppy, ready to love, with a mean fighting dog, taught to kill. The same applies to humans.

We believe everything is a physical manifestation of spirit — alive, sentient, conscious and spiritual. We believe air, fire, water, earth, animals are our brothers and sisters and should be loved and treated with respect. We believe there is divinity in every spirit. Thus, everyone and thing should be revered for their divinity and the gifts they give to us for our survival. Therefore to the Witches, pollution is the ungrateful torture and murder of nature's spiritual beings.



## Ethics

Because we see ourselves as being connected to every existing thing on the earth, the biggest 'sin' is to do violence to another which is the same as dishonouring the Goddess and God and hurting ourselves. The ethics of Wicca are based on the laws of cause and effect — 'what goes around comes around'. It is a form of *karma* in that if you choose certain behaviours, you will submit to the laws of their effects. Because negative behaviours produce negative effects, we always work in a positive manner. Our motto is "Do what thou wilt an it harm none and "Perfect love and perfect trust."

## Death

We believe in reincarnation. That is to say, we believe that at death the spirit is not destroyed but goes to a place of rest, reunion and transformation, before moving into another life. In point of fact, apart from this, ideas about life after death are more based on personal intuition than doctrine.

## Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a huge topic in religion, too rich to explore here. Suffice it to say that Witches use only vegetable sacrifice — wine, cakes and incense. Animal sacrifice is *not* a Wiccan tradition although it is a tradition in Judaism and Christianity. Ironically, it is Christianity which holds human sacrifice as a central theme and explicitly sacrifices wine and bread as blood and body. The psychopathic individuals who perform Satanic masses that involve human or animal sacrifice are twisting the Christian message. These acts have nothing whatever to do with the Pagan traditions of nature worship as celebrated by Witches.

## Organization

There is no central authority to Wicca. We organize ourselves in individual covens (to a maximum of thirteen in each) and while central motifs stay the same, covens may modify rituals and ceremonies to suit their own creativity. Covens are led by a High Priestess or a High Priestess-and-High Priest team. In Wicca, authority defers to the female because she, like the Goddess, gives birth to incarnated spirit, thereby giving the sacred gift of life. Men are also witches, not warlocks (which term means one who has betrayed one's honour and fellows). We accept new initiates as brothers and sisters, on equal footing, not as disciples, followers or victims. Witches provide priesthood functions for Pagans who believe the same things but who are not active practitioners of ritual and the sciences of life such as healing, divination and spells. However, this does not mean that Witches are superior to Pagans, only that they are simply specialists in the Pagan ways. There are many branches of Wiccan tradition: Family Tradition, Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Fairy, Seax, Dianic.

## Symbols

The central symbols to Wicca are the circle, because it is the most perfect form seen in nature; the equal-armed cross representing the four directions and four elements; and the pentagram — an ancient symbol of balance and protection; the four elements united by spirit. The symbol for infinity is frequently used due to its equilibrium and its eternal motion. Black and white are used to represent the opposites in nature which are also paradoxically the One. Typical animals are the spider, which is symbolic of the Goddess in her destiny-weaving aspect and the snake, which symbolizes the God's rejuvenating and life energy powers.

## Tools

The "tools of the trade" include psychic powers, intellectual powers, emotive powers, imaginative powers and counselling wisdom. We use the broom, candles, incense, the chalice and wand.

We use crystals, cards, astrology, numerology, psychometry and other forms of divination.

Wicca means the 'way of the Wise'. It is a mystical, mystery tradition: self-searching, self-disciplining and self-realizing. It is not a path for everyone. However, those who seek it and are willing to learn are welcomed with open arms. "We meet in peace, in love we depart: merry meet and merry part and merry meet again!"

#### *Footnotes*

- <sup>1</sup> *This is the Celtic name of the "nature worship" religion of pre-Christian Britain which in English is known as Witchcraft. The practitioners of this religion are known as Wicca (f.) or Wicce (m.) or Witches, and the adjective is Wiccan.*

*Liz Moes is a high school teacher and High Priestess of a Wicca Coven. She holds a degree in Religion and Psychoanalysis from the University of Toronto where she is currently Associate Chaplin. Ms. Moes lives with her husband and black cat in Toronto.*



# The Refuge Lady: An Invocation

by Leslie Hamson

*An excerpt from a presentation piece for women's voices. One to several voices may be used at the Director's discretion. Change of voice is suggested by the direction 'VOICE'.*

VOICE: As she walks, the Lady Refuge, eddies of leaves — yellow orange green and brown, cyclone out from beneath her billowing skirts that tilt and sway with the tilting and swaying of her hips as she places her little feet, neatly buttoned into black leather boots, along the red-earthen path in precise firm steppings.

VOICE: Her skirt has many pockets of many colours, and there are many things in them. Above her rounded hips she wears a billowing overskirt with many pockets of many different colours, and they are full of things, too —

VOICE: Seashells and purple eggplants, empty matchbooks and amethyst crystals . . .

VOICE: Orange peel, banana peel, walnut shells and red potatoes still in their skins . . .

- VOICE: A pocket calculator and a pencil with a broken point,  
a stapler a glue stick a cellular phone . . .
- VOICE: A cedar tree a medicine pipe a toothbrush a drum . . .
- VOICE: A lakeside, a hillside, and a side of beef . . .
- VOICE: A splitrail fence and a hollied wreath and a '57 Ford  
truck with modified dual suspension springs.
- VOICE: The planets, the stars, are sewn in glittering lines all  
along the hem of her skirt and her hair is cloudy with  
galaxies.
- VOICE: These are a few of the many things the Lady keeps  
about her self . . .
- VOICE: And for all this, the Lady has no weight . . .
- VOICE: . . . is lighter than air . . .  
. . . more open than space.
- VOICE: The elephants and whales and moose and lynx frolic  
weightlessly in the dancing blue/green folds of her  
skirt, the birds on her wrists are coloured darings with  
twigs in their mouths.
- VOICE: Sometimes the Refuge Lady takes form as a tree.
- VOICE: Her neatly buttoned black boots spiral down into the  
soil, the laces unravel and burrow and nudge between  
grains of sand and minerals and composted vegetable  
matter.
- VOICE: Her shins, her knees her thighs spiral and twine . . .
- VOICE: Her skirts with their many pockets flow upward, flow  
outward like an umbrella turned inside out in a high  
mighty wind.

- VOICE: Her naked glowing skin darkens and corrugates into runneled bark . . .
- VOICE: Her breasts are rounded boles . . .
- VOICE: Her throat a hollow where drums the flashing red head of a woodpecker — tok tok tok tok tok . . .
- VOICE: Her mouth is a barky waiting smile . . .
- VOICE: Her arms twist and gnarl, her elbows jut, her fingers twig out . . .
- VOICE: Her eyes are winking shadows of light.
- VOICE: Her hair, greening. lifting and twining, is still cloudy with the light of galaxies.
- VOICE: This is the Lady Refuge — that's ReFUGE, not Refuse, because the Lady never refuses anyone anything —
- VOICE: Not the pigletted urchin selling Girlguide cookies . . .
- VOICE: Not the grieving Mama whose kids are on drugs . . .
- VOICE: Nor the baby dying of AIDS . . .
- VOICE: Nor the politician dying of corruption . . .
- VOICE: Nor the meditator praying for peace.
- VOICE: Shoppers recycle their brown paper bags here, navigators rekeel their boats, computer programmers practice esoterics up her sleeves, jewellers finger enviously her radiant buttons, not really believing they can take them for their own.
- VOICE: (These are the things and the beings the Lady has no problem looking after. Its the religious ones that give



the trouble, for they have no faith. She keeps a whole supply of candles and church linens and crucifixes and buddarupas and rosaries and mallahs and synagogues and temples and tombs for these ones.

VOICE: The musicians strum and trill and thump . . .

VOICE: Rocks split open and spill forth light . . .

VOICE: Soup bowls chowder spill-lessly around, around the spaces beneath her up-out-float-down arms . . .

*(VOICES BREAK INTO EACH OTHER ON "/" AND SPACE OUT AGAIN ON "... ")*

VOICE: And oh, what a dancing/

VOICE: /and shaking/

VOICE: /and stepping/

VOICE: /and breaking/

VOICE: /and mending/

VOICE: /and defecating/

VOICE: /and dying/

VOICE: /and renewing/

VOICE: /is going on/

VOICE: /is undoing . . .

VOICE: . . . is standing absolutely still . . .

ALL VOICES: . . . in the inexhaustible light of our dancing Lady Refuge.

Production history: The version of *The Refugee Lady* presented here was performed by eleven women at the Second International Women's Playwrighting Conference, Toronto, May 1991.

This version was also used as the foundation piece for a collectively written work presented by The Refugee Theatre Collective at the annual women's conference, Whitehorse, June 1991; and again, with revisions, at the family violence conference, October 1991.

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*Leslie Hamson currently lives and works in the far North although her travels have taken her as far south as Vancouver and Mexico. She works with healing both for herself and the people in her community.*

# The Ladies

by Ann Wallace

I remember the day I purchased Merlin Stone's remarkable book, *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood*. I was in transit in London, on my way to Lisbon. I had several hours to fill before take off, so I meandered along Charing Cross Road and purchased several books and magazines.

On my arrival in Lisbon, I was very busy. I spent two weeks at the library trying to complete my research, I visited my relatives and spent sometime cleaning up the grave side of my grandfather, who had died of a fever there many years ago. My final destination for the next three months was Lagos, in the Algarve, where I planned on completing two books.

On my first day in Lagos, I ventured to the city centre and took *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood* with me. I found a cool spot near the sea and opened the book. I scanned the Table of Contents. Closed my eyes and looked again. My eyes had not deceived me — I let out a gleeful yell in appreciation because for the first time ever, I saw the names of Black African Goddesses in a book, not just one but several, and one name in particular jumped off the page to embrace me. The name — Mawu-Lisa.

Mawu-Lisa, her name was whispered with reverence and awe by my great-grandmother and Miss Anna. The name that as a young girl I called Lady He/She — the name of the creator/creator of the universe, the universal mother, the Dahomean deity of deities, Mawu-Lisa.



Mawu-Lisa, the primordial twins of Nana Buklulu, Mawu-Lisa, the parents of the vodums, earth and sky gods and goddesses, the goddess, whose symbol was the rainbow and the serpent, The Goddess who was inextricably linked to Mamacita and her friend, Miss Anna.

When I was eight years old, my grandmother told us that her mother and her oldest friend was coming to live with us as they could no longer live on their own. They would live in the casita, which my grandmother had lived in for years and that she wanted all of us children to remember to be very respectful. We of course, had heard of Mamacita, but we had never met her.

My father and grandmother left for Recife and on their arrival, we were all waiting on the verandah to greet them. The Ladies were very, very old. Miss Anna, whose sight was just about gone, walked with a large black cane and she looked very sad. When she spoke her voice was rich and melodious. Mamacita who was about 100 years at the time, was tall and angular. Her voice was thin and reedy and her eyes danced with mischief. We children fell deeply in love with our Ladies. That was the name that we gave them as they were inseparable.

Mamacita loved to sing and dance. Though her voice was now gone and her dance was more like a shuffle, some mornings I could see her dancing with an imaginary partner. She circled the silk cotton tree, seemed to bow, then, lifting the hem of her dress, she curtsied, and as the sun came over the mountains, her silhouette seemed to merge into the tree and they became one. Being young, it seemed quite magical to me.

Every evening as the sun was sinking, we would gather at the casita to listen to the wonderful stories about the old days, about how the world was created, the never ending tales of bull roarers and always about the vodon deity of deities, Mawu-Lisa. Each evening they would say to the departing sun, "Lisa (male) keep the world safe from all harm". To the moon, Mawu (female) "Welcome, welcome, you bring us joy and rest". The Ladies also loved to hug and kiss us. They called us their heartstrings.

One of the first acts my parents performed on the arrival of the Ladies, was to build them a small hut in the middle of the forest. We were warned *never, ever* to go there, or else! Because The Ladies were lovers of nature, they spent a great deal of time tending their garden, looking after the young saplings, taking care

of sick animals, particularly birds. We would often be with them as they performed these duties, which they considered both vital as well as sacred.

One day, curiosity got the better of us. As soon as everyone left the house, my brother and I, on the pretext that we were going to shoot birds, took off for the forest. We came upon the hut. This was it! This was the place we were never, ever to visit! It was so ordinary.

The hut was made of wattle and daub. The front door was painted blue and the outside walls had drawings of moons, stars, the sun and a rainbow that had a wavy look to it. There was also a coiled 'thing' at the entrance of the hut. We knew that it had to be the coiled serpent, but it didn't quite look like a serpent. These were the symbols of Mawu-Lisa.

The Ladies were sitting under a large tree in cane chairs. There was a potter's wheel (in her younger days, Mamacita was a potter) and they were deep in conversation. Beside the wheel was a garden, the smell was wonderful, and near the garden was several clay pots filled with water (we later found out that was there for the birds).

The door opened and out stepped our grandmother. We were shocked. Our Gran who was the bastion of the Anglican church was the one who kept warning us *not* to visit the hut, the one that forbade us to visit the squares when the vodum drummers were playing, as we were all good Christians, and here she was! Gran beckoned to us to come to her. We wanted to run. Gran did not take kindly to being disobeyed, especially by small children. She opened the door to the hut. We entered. There was a small altar, candles, two chairs, some beautiful woven blankets and pillows on the floor. On one side was a large cassava bowl filled with water and a clay pot filled with white powder, a bowl of dried herbs, a woven mat and another clay urn filled with wild lilies.

Gran looked at our faces sensing our disappointment. She told us this was a shrine and that we should always respect it, never deface it, and most of all, we should respect all living things and we should never, never, kill birds, eyeing the slingshot.

"Do you know who Otutu is?" she asked.

We shook our heads.

"Well let me tell you the story of Otutu, the songbird who saved the world from destruction."



"Mawu-Lisa had a son whom they called Legba. Legba was also the God of Fates, the Messenger God, and the God of Language. Humans both loved and feared him but when they were in distress, they always asked Legba to intercede with his parents Mawu-Lisa, on their behalf. Legba had a brother named Sogbo, the God of Thunder and Lightning, who was very, very jealous of his young sibling, Sogbo. He felt that both humans and his family took him for granted. So, one day, in a fit of jealous rage, he decided to punish humans by withholding rain from the earth."

"The seas dried up. The vegetation rotted. Animals and humans started to die. In desperation, the people of the earth called upon the God of Fates, Legba, and begged him to save them from total destruction. Legba flew beyond the clouds to his parents and tried to intercede on their behalf. Mawu-Lisa knew that Sogbo had to be handled with care and, in order not to create any further hardships for the peoples of the earth, She/He told Legba, that he should send the songbird Otutu to earth. When the final destruction was imminent, Otutu would sing to Legba to warn him. When Legba, The God of Fates, the Messenger God, the God of Language heard the sweet sounds of the songbird Otutu, he flew beyond the clouds and told his parents."

"Mawu-Lisa sent the rains to earth. The seas once again had water. The vegetation grew. Animals and humans were saved from starvation. and, in order for humans to know when the rains would be over, She/He created the rainbow, so when humans saw this, they would know that they were safe from being flooded."

"Gran, do you believe in Lady He/She"? I asked.

Gran smiled and nodded. "Just because I don't encourage you in the rites, does not mean that I don't believe myself. But your parents do not want you to get mixed up in such things and there are other people who have no understandings of our religion, that it is better for you not to know too much."

"But, Gran, I want to know. I love hearing about Mawu-Lisa. She is like us. She is us. After all, Gran, all the other lady saints are white, but Mawu-Lisa is black. Isn't that wonderful, Gran, isn't that so?"

My Gran looked at me for a very long time. She nodded her head and, pulling both of us to her, we walked outside to the Ladies.

Mamacita and Miss Anna looked at all of us. Their faces lit up as they realized that it was all right to talk to us as Gran did not look disapproving as usual. Mamacita started to talk, but it was so lyrical, I thought it was poetry.

"My people, your people are of the Fon tribe. We are the followers of the beautiful and bountiful Goddess, Mawu-Lisa, the primordial twins. She came on the slave ship that took my Mama and brought her to this world. My Mama clung to the only reality she had — that of her religion. They could beat, humiliate and degrade her, but they could not take her religion away from her. All the women on the slave ships prayed to their Goddesses: Mawu-Lisa, the Universal, The goddess of Justice, Ala, The River Goddess Iamanja and Oya, The Goddess of all the Elements. Of course, over the years we have joined the Christian religion, and they have all tried to eradicate the memory of who we are/were from us, but we could not forget *our* Goddesses for, if we did, we would forget our ancestors, we would forget ourselves, we would forget Mother Africa."

Miss Ann, who rarely spoke, started to chant. Her voice was rich in texture, even though she was quite old. With a smile on her face, clapping her hands, the names flowed from her lips. This was her mantra.

"Oh, Mawu-Lisa, Vodum of Vodums, love and protect us. Ala, Earth Mother, Goddess of Justice and Freedom, love and protect us. Iamanja, Goddess of the Rivers, take our souls back to our ancestral lands. Oya, Goddess of all the Elements, smile down our enemies with your mighty force, love and protect us. Mama Gron, love and protect us. Aieeeee. Aieeeee. Mawu-Lisa, Mawu-Lisa, love and protect us."

I could feel chills up my spine. The hut was no longer just wattle and daub. It was a shrine. It was, in fact, the wellspring of our spirituality.

After that very special event that took place at the hut, I started to listen intently to all the stories The Ladies told us. I asked millions of questions about the many legends, the mythologies and the folktales that Africa has enriched the world with. It seems that, with each passing day, I began to understand something of the world I lived in. I am not sure how, but I just started to understand the many symbols. Sometimes I would see Mamacita and Miss Anna looking at me then looking at each other.



July, 1953, was a very special month. It was the month of Mamacita's 103rd birthday. The family decided that we were going to have a festival. The whole village was invited and the atmosphere had the feel of carnival. Many members of our family were coming to the 'event'. It was wonderful. Our house was filled with new people, new ideas were being discussed, there were books and records we had not read or heard of. Each day, Mamacita and Miss held court as we young children told them of the many doings that took place the night before. Mamacita's great-grand children from abroad, did not know her and they found her in the beginning, a bit weird, but after they got to talk and listen to her, they too fell in love. We saw people who seem so sophisticated and cool become warm and friendly.

A few days before the actual event, a group of men visited my father. We came out of the casita and Mamacita clapped her hands in joy — these were the vodum drummers and they were going to play at her party. They bowed respectfully to her and left. We were stunned because, no matter what was said, our parents did not really like us to be involved too much with anything that smacked of voodoo. We were thrilled. We loved to hear the drumming at night and felt that it would add the finishing touch to Mamacita's birthday.

The party was to start at dusk. A large tent had been set up in the centre of the field. Inside the tent, the tables were laden with food, drink and pastries. There was a large table in the centre which was covered with a lace table cloth tatted by my mother. The lace cloth had moons, star and sun patterns and the table was decorated with wild orchids and lilies. A large cake was placed in the middle with smaller cakes on each side. It looked more like a wedding than a birthday.

During the day, Mamacita and Miss Anna kept sniffing the air. The sky was a brilliant blue with just a hint of orange and the air was still. There was also a faint, acrid smell that seemed to permeate the area.

In honour of Mamacita's day, we the younger children decided to put on a skit. The play would be the creation of the world according to Fon mythology. The older children would sing, some would recite poetry and the adults would of course, give speeches.

Gran would be the voice of Mawu-Lisa's mother, Nana Buk-lulu, so as the sun was going down and the moon rising, Gran's

sonorous voice said: "I am Nana Buklulu, and today, I have given my children Mawu (female) identified as the moon, and Lisa (male) identified with the sun, the authority to put the universe in order and to see that the universe is populated with human beings and animals, with vegetation and oceans. You, the primordial twins, have exactly four days in which to do this and, should you fail, there will be chaos in the universe."

*On the first day, Mawu-Lisa gave shape and order to the universe.*

*On the second day, the earth was made habitable for all living things.*

*On the third day, the peoples of the earth received three very important gifts: the gift of speech, the gift of sight and the gift of knowledge.*

*On the last and final day, the world was given technology.*

But humans needed guidance. They had to be taught many skills and how to live not only with each other but with the creatures of the earth. Mawu-Lisa called their children, who would henceforth be known as vodums (deities in the Fon language) and gave them the authority to govern and protect the earth and all its living beings.

The vodums were Age, God of Animals and the Savannahs, he would be worshipped by all hunters. Loko, God of the Trees and Forests, he would be worshipped by shamans and herbalists. Ayaba, Goddess of the Hearth and Family, she would be worshipped by all women. Legba, The God of Fates, also known as the Messenger God and the God of Languages, he would be worshipped by all humans. Sogbo, the God of Thunder and Lightning, he would be worshipped by blacksmiths and soldiers and Sagbata and his twin sister would become the first parents of all humans.

Mawu-Lisa, realizing that humans, like their gods, could be difficult and jealous, put into place the ceremonies and rites that humans would enact to placate and appease the deities. She/He knew it was also essential for humans to have spirituality in order for them to comprehend not only the cosmic dimensions but their own frailties. Thus the voodoo religion was established. The followers of voodoo live in a world that has no distinction between

the physical and the spiritual and music, dance and spiritualized chants are used to create harmony and balance with both worlds. But, the followers of the religion must have a mediator and that mediator is the Drummer. For it is the drummer who is the liaison between humans and their gods and goddesses. It is the drummer who transforms the calls which are uttered during sacrificial ceremonies, and it is the drummer who ensures that all the rituals are in place before the ceremonies can begin.

Because of the ages of The Ladies, it had been decided that many aspects of the ceremonies would not be held in public. The music started and one of the ladies started to chant. Her voice was as pure as a diva. She closed her eyes and started to dance. Suddenly Mamacita's head jerked. She had heard her note. She got up with Miss Anna who laid down her walking stick and, calling the children to them, they started to dance.

At first my feet faltered then, without warning, I seemed to be dancing with a gracefulness that was unexpected. I closed my eyes, giving myself up to the exquisite feeling of euphoria that washed over me. The chanting grew more intense, I felt frightened. The circle seemed to be breaking up. I opened my eyes and saw Mamacita, her face grey, sweat running down her cheeks, holding her chest. The drummers stopped drumming. My father looked worried and moved from the back of the line towards his grandmother. She waved him away and said something to the drummers, who started to softly play once again.

If I had not been at the party, I would never have believed what took place. Mamacita closed her eyes and started to dance slowly. She held out her hands to her oldest and dearest friend, Miss Anna, and they danced together. Their movements were not awkward, they moved gracefully in a circle. The faces, one ebony the other mahoe, seemed young and girlish. I blinked. This was impossible. Then I heard the chants from them. They were singing in the Fon language. The clapping began, and gradually the other members of the group joined in.

I felt great happiness and deep sadness all at once. I knew this would be the last time I would ever participate at such a ceremony and I also knew that Mamacita would die shortly.

The party was wonderful. We were so tired, that we fell asleep immediately. The next day, the sky seemed to be covered with more than a hint of orange. The acrid smell was still there. The



Ladies took off to their hut and they were gone for a long time. When they returned, they called our parents and, in low but urgent voices, seemed to be advising them about something. Later that day, we were told that we would be visiting my mother's relatives on the other side of the mountain and that we would be leaving by the weekend.

Three days after her 103rd birthday, Mamacita died quietly in her sleep. The only thing she said that would have indicated her imminent death, was that she felt very tired. I found her still in bed after 6:00 a.m. She looked so peaceful, I did not realize that she was dead. It was not until I heard Miss Anna moan that I realized that the still figure would never again dance with her imaginary partner. That I would never smell the bay rum which she felt kept her fresh and stopped the ache in her bones. No longer would I hear her reedy voice telling us stories about bull roarers, why women did not wear masks and about Mawu-Lisa.

I ran out of the casita and sat under the silk cotton tree. I wanted to chant the name of Loko, God of the Forests, to protect the soul of my Mamacita, to Mawu-Lisa, to take her to the heavens, but no words came. Tears fell down my cheeks. I felt a light touch on my shoulder, it was Miss Anna. She hugged me and reminded me that the soul of our ancestors lived in the silk cotton tree, the tree that was so sacred to the Fon people that they made sure wherever they went, a tree was immediately planted. Miss Anna rocked me back and forth. Though young, I suddenly realized that she, more than all of us, would miss Mamacita deeply. They had been friends for over 90 years. I felt my arms going around her stooped shoulders and chanted softly: "Mawu-Lisa, the Universal Mother, love and protect us. Ala, Earth Goddess, love and protect us. Iamanja, Goddess of the Rivers, take our souls back to our ancestral lands, love and protect us and Oya, Goddess of all the Elements, love and protect us."

Mamacita had dreamt for five days in a row, that there was going to be an earthquake. She knew exactly when it was coming and forewarned both my parents and the townspeople. Many listened to her and others just thought the old lady was gaga.

When the earthquake came, exactly at 3:00 p.m. that Saturday, the mountain was practically levelled. The few remaining people who would not leave their possessions all died and the government would not allow anyone to return there for many months.



When we eventually returned to the area, all that was left was a wall of the casita, one silk cotton tree and, surprisingly, the potter's wheel. We sprinkled libations on the spot that once was Mamacita's grave, took the potter's wheel and some seedlings from the tree and left, never to return.

Miss Anna died in September of that year. She was 102 years old. When she died, we were very proud that we could perform the rites of burial and I know that she met Mamacita as they both floated towards the clouds into the waiting arms of Mawu-Lisa.

I got up from the bench and walked towards the sea. Memories of so long ago flooded me. I felt as if Mamacita was near me. I looked around, smiling sheepishly at myself. Then, lifting up my arms, I started to dance and, as I made the third circle, I could have sworn I smelled the refreshing fragrance of bay rum.

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# Tibetan Goddesses

by Charlene Jones

## General Information about Tibetan Buddhist Meditation

The Tibetan Buddhist system of meditation consists of two main practices: samatha, or visualization, and vipassana, or insight. The Buddhists of three thousand years ago understood that what is created by the mind has power and affects the body and emotions. They also knew that what is created by the mind is endowed with energy and that energy can be an integrating factor in a person's quest for individuation. Of course, they called it something else. They called the quest for individuation (Jung's term) "enlightenment." The Buddhists, who borrowed in Tibet from the existing practices of the Bon peoples, understood that many different kinds of people exist with many different needs. Their system of visualization therefore, includes a panoply of vital potentials: from the smiling, beneficent energies of the peaceful manifestations, to the blood-dripping wrath of the angry manifestations. Both sexes were included in every aspect of visualization, so where there is a peaceful female, there is also a peaceful male and where an angry male raises his curved knife to the sky, a wrathful female does the same. The Tibetans understood that both sexes need all aspects of being human to be free, in order that liberation (individuation, enlightenment) may occur. The Tibetan system of visualization therefore includes a Father Line, beginning with a root deity called HeVagra, and a Mother Line, beginning with a root deity called DemChog. Neither is superior to the other. Each is

powerful. The initiation ceremony and practice of DemChog, or any of the female deities, is given equal respect to any of the male deities. Here, then, are a few of the female deities commonly practiced as visualization meditations in the Tibetan Buddhist system of meditation.

### White Tara

**T**he second female deity presented here is *White Tara*. She is one of twenty-one Taras, who each have different colours. She sits on a lotus blossom, (or any multi-petalled blossom) on a moon disc. Here again of course, are echoes of the Old Religion — all the deities who sit, do so on a Moon disc. The Moon is said to be *the* symbol of aspiration in the Tibetan system of symbols. A Sun disc sometimes is at the back of the deity, upon which the deity rests. The sun, then, may be seen as that which has already been accomplished, and so acts as a support whose light shines upon the Moon Disc, which is beneath the deity and which then reflects upward, to indicate aspiration. And the Moon waxes and wanes, so the appearance of aspiration may change: The aspiration to awaken may one day take the form of sitting in meditation, and the next day be learning computers, or dancing at the local bar. And, aspiration may vary from person to person, so the form of aspiration of one person, may be very different from the form of aspiration of the next.

But Tara sits on the Moon disc, and rests against the Sun disc. Her left hand holds the stem of a white lotus, which blooms near her ear. Her right arm is extended, the palm facing outward. She wears jewels and precious silks and has seven visible eyes — three in her head, one in each palm and one in the sole of each foot. A tiara of magnificent jewels crowns her. She is full of ease and the bliss of rest.

The silk clothes indicate she is more in tune with the social mores of the culture than the manifestation of bliss called Dorje Palmo, or any of the Herukas. The jewels and ornaments indicate she has a body free of trauma, and cleared of restriction, so the energy flows smoothly all through her, (see Wilhelm Reiche, *Function of the Orgasm*, or Robert Lowen *Betrayal of the Body*, for a more western version of free flowing energy body). The



extended right hand indicates energy flowing outward, a gesture of giving, but the giving is conditioned to some respect, by the presence of the lotus at the left ear. She holds the stem of the lotus to her heart, which is the organ of intelligence in the east, and which also has to do with clear communication: communication is an activity of the heart, not the head. She listens from her heart, then, as indicated by the flower, and then responds through the right hand, in an appropriate manner. In the full ceremony, she contains a water-wheel, lying horizontally, from which pours out the bliss in an unending stream in all directions.

One thing that is important to notice is the western concept of self and other. The practitioners of these meditations do not necessarily hold that concept of separation. So Tara's unending giving is *not* seen as a martyrdom, or any of the lesser forms of giving. She is full, herself, of the bliss which is generated at her heart centre; it pours through all the cells of her body first and, in the sheer abundance of it, it pours out to others. She is not necessarily active in "giving". In fact, that kind of activity is frowned upon. The idea is instead, fulfill yourself first, and through that joy and bliss will be naturally, without effort, extended to others.

This idea is also manifest in the aura of flowers which surround her, and the scent of perfume which arises from her body. She is the embodiment of bliss and the joy of it exudes from her.

The Tara manifestations remove obstacles, transmute fear, quell nervousness, calm anxiety, and are, in general, part of the healing vibration (although all of the deities can be used for healing, each in a particular way, in a particular time). Tara is considered the Mother of all Beings; again, it is important to notice the cultural implications of this. In the Tibetan religion, there is a saying "All beings are my mother: All beings are my father." Men mother and women father. No distinction is made in the ideals held.

### Dorje Palmo

**D**orje Palmo is red, wrathful, and naked, glowing with the brilliance of a ruby. She has one face, two arms and three eyes. She dances with her right leg bent and right foot uplifted. Her left foot treads on the breast of a prostrate human form. Her right hand



holds aloft a brightly gleaming curved knife with dorje handle, called a Purba. Her left hand holds at her breast, a human skull filled with blood. Hanging around her neck she wears a necklace of fifty freshly-severed human heads, all dripping blood. She wears the mirror of karma, held in place by a double string of human bone beads slung over her shoulder and hanging down to her waist. In the bend of her left arm, she holds the long staff of Will, the energy of sustained effort. She has armbands and bracelets, wristlets and anklets and upon her head, she wears a tiara of five dried human skulls. Within her hair, which is piled up and flows around her head, appears the head of a sow. Dorje Palmo is sixteen years old, intensely sexual and in the full bloom of virginity. Flames of transcendent wisdom form a halo all around her.

The aspirant to Buddhist meditation practice would be given this visualization during the ceremony of initiation into the practice of Dorje Palmo, would be given the specific mantra to practice with this visualization, and would be given instructions on how to proceed with the meditation prior to and following the actual visualization. Each participant in ceremony is encouraged to complete ten thousand repetitions of the mantra within twenty-four hours of receiving the initiation, ten thousand mantras with visualization, to seal the experience, and then, in this lifetime, the participant is instructed to complete one hundred thousand repetitions of the mantra and visualization. The visualization is not done with each mantra, which is often only a few syllables long, but as the meditator creates the mental picture of the deity, and proceeds in the pre-visualization and post-visualization practice, the mantras are tumbling from her mouth.

At some point, the meditator begins to question what these strange symbols mean. Why fifty freshly-severed human heads, dripping blood? Why a staff? And as the questions emerge, the mind of the practitioner connects these symbols to whatever else looks like them, in the practitioner's experience, and hauls forth other kinds of data on the symbols, and the teacher, if the practitioner is fortunate enough to be around her teacher, will give hints, and clues. Finally, the practitioner has enough information from her own mind, and the meaning of the symbol is made clear through the practitioner's mind, or the mind of the teacher (or outside sources, such as books etc.)

Many of the symbols occur and reoccur in one deity after another. The appearance of ornaments, bracelets etc., is an indication that the energy of the full body is in operation. And not just the physical body, but the energy body which is worn like a sheath, in some layers, within and around the physical body. But to start with the physical — the ornaments represent a clearing of any trauma which might have blocked the energy which now flows through the arms and legs freely.

The staff represents whatever staffs represent to the participant: will, an aid in moving (as in walking staff), a weapon (as in Kendo stick), or perhaps more esoterically, the ability to focus and sustain energy in any given direction. The fifty freshly-severed human heads, as well as the corpse upon which she dances, have to do with some of the major impact of her energy — the ability to leave the past truly behind. Dorje Palmo is the one who releases us (she is the manifestation of that energy within), from clinging to the past, be it the last moment, or the last decade. She has, in the sense of being released from the past, overcome death (our conditioned view of death) and this is represented by her victory stance on the corpse — leave the dead to be dead. And she does. The necklace has to do with having overcome the pain of trying to cling to passion. This is not, as is true in the Christian religion, anything to do with not *feeling* passions, or putting the passions down, or splitting them from the consciousness. Dorje Palmo in fact helps increase the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, by releasing us from the grip of clinging to that pleasure. The skulls are freshly severed — she has, only moments before, cut off the heads of those energies which would have us cling to the past. She has enjoyed the past, and now she dances on.

Again, her waistband and necklaces of a more traditional nature indicate she has freed the energy in that part of her body. And, again, the skull cup and *purba* (curved knife) represent her, as they do wherever they appear in Tibetan iconography, the cutting off of that which plagues us. In this case, the *purba* means cutting off the streams of discursive thought which interfere with our enjoyment of the drinking the bliss of the pleasure of each moment, as symbolized by the skull cup. She drinks the blood of each moment, the pleasure and bliss in each experience, and cuts off the discursive thought about it. She stays in the physical and



energy bodies and dances through life in those manifestations, with the wisdom and true intelligence of her being shining.

The five dried skulls represent her purity of the senses. She is not motivated by greed, hatred or delusion; she is mistress of her senses and what information and bliss they convey, and she dances on.

That she is naked symbolizes a certain freedom from the outer forms of social convention. She dances without those forms, in the best style of the Herukas (naked ones) who do not, in Tibetan iconography, need social convention. She is sixteen, or very young and in the full bloom of sexuality. Her sexual power is raised and her sexual energy flows from the secret place of bliss, throughout her body to free her. Her sexuality *fre*es her — she is the embodiment of the wrath of women as they dance beyond social expectations and conventions regarding their sexuality. She is freely sexual. And, her virginity accords with the etymology of the word — originally, virgin meant “full”. She is full of the bliss of her own sexual energy, and through its coursing in her body, she lights the fires of transcendent wisdom which flame in a halo around her. And she dances on.

Finally, the sow in her head (Dorje Palmo is often called the “Diamond Sow”) echoes the Old Religion. And the tradition of witchcraft and shape changing is revered among the Tibetans as evidenced by this story:

In one of the many invasions of Tibet, the Tibetans knew beforehand that they were in danger. And so they hurried to gather everyone and everything of value from the palaces. But Dorje Palmo, in her chambers with her women, could not leave the palace in time, so she transformed herself into a mother sow and her women into piglets and when the Chinese entered, they saw the dirty Tibetans live with pigs. The Sow and her Piglets went squealing away from the palace into safety.

This story is repeated with pride among Tibetan Buddhists, men and women alike. This is part of why they are called, by much of the west, a “superstitious” people.

The sow of course has also to do with fertility, and the ability to take pleasure in the moment. The “Diamond” name applies to her state of mind — as clear and unmoving as a diamond.



**T**he Sanskrit word MA means Mother, just as Mamma means the same in English. Incidentally, MA also means Great. The Great. That which is nothing greater. PA means Father, just as it means father in English. So KarmaPa is the father of activity, as the much-abused term "Karma" actually translates to mean "activity." The Western flurry over "Karma" actually belongs to that joint concept "Karma-Vipaka." It is the Vipaka which returns. Vipaka means that which returns. So Karma-Vipaka means Activity which Returns. And, of course, the concept includes the idea of no-self, which immediately shows the innocence of westerners who speak of "My Karma." The great streams of energy in the east all include the concept of no-self, or, as I have come to enjoy thinking of it, the Self which has embraced all, or the All-Self. In that sense, it is silly to try to speak of "My Karma."

NamgyalMa has three faces, eight arms and two legs. One imagines a pink lotus blossom, upon which appears Amitabha, a male deity. The crown of Amitabha is milk white, and inside that crown, atop of Amitabha, appears NamgyalMa. Two arms hold the Dorje (thunder symbol, see pics.) One right hand holds it, the Dorje, while the left makes a sign above it. Hand gestures, or signs, are called "mudras." The top right arm holds a casket with Sakyamuni Buddha inside the heart of the casket. The second right arm holds an arrow and the third is in the blessed bestowing mudra, as seen in White Tara. The top left arm holds a golden noose in a fierce hand mudra (mudra means sign, and in the case of hands indicates the hand is held in a particular posture). This left hand also shows the letter HRIH on it.

The middle left hand holds a bow and the bottom left hand holds a vase. A ten syllable mantra, in Sanskrit (Sanskrit is always only the written form of the language; when it is spoken, it is called Pali, and differences exist between Pali and Sanskrit) circles around her heart, around a seed syllable BHRUM. (See syllables, which almost all Sanskrit letters are, are letters which contain an energy to be unlocked. The Tibetans, when they first discovered writing, or had it revealed to them, called it "Deva Nagari": Divine, Shining Snakes. They believe the letters themselves hold a power, and energy, in their shape and in their sound.)

Her yellow face is turned to the right.

Her blue face is turned to the left.

She is sitting in full lotus posture; her body is young and firm and she is very beautiful.

First, because she arises from the head of Amitabha (echoes of Athene) does not mean she is secondary to him, but rather that she is the essence of him. She is the best of him, and only a drop of her is necessary for the completion of his vibration. She has three faces; three aspects, of course, but instead of being linearly divided in time, the three aspects are distinguished by colour. The Tibetan systems work on a non-linear time frame. They move from something they call "beginningless time" to the great "no-end." So, the yellow indicates spontaneous, free-flowing intellect, and is a slightly wrathful aspect (as, indeed, the overall picture of NamgyalMa is slightly wrathful). The blue face to the left indicates the calm base of energy.

The symbols: the casket indicates the appearance of death, but inside is Sakyamuni, the last Guatema Buddha, the one usually referred to as "The Buddha" (although by now it is clear that many, many Buddhas, or Deities, in many forms, exist) who is a master of will. An aspect of will is involved in staying clear through the small death of each moment in life, and in the larger death of the body, so the continuity of life may be perceived.

The second arm holds an arrow, and is matched by the bow on the other side. Besides cultural indications of independence through being able to hunt and ward off enemies on the outer plane, the arrow and bow indicate the inner ability to discriminate, to see directly to the heart of the matter, and to follow that insight with the correct arrow of activity, speech or energy to impart a cleansing and healing.

The golden noose has the implications of cutting off the unwholesome particularly the unwholesome mind states. Gold is the colour of consciousness. Consciousness here wraps itself around the discursive negativity and chokes it. This is also indicated by the fierce mudra and the HRIH, which syllable serves to raise the energy (literally, in the body, and figuratively, to a higher level).

The vase in the left hand indicates the body itself, and shows it full of the amrit nectar of bliss.

These deities represent some aspects of female energy, alive in both males and females, which are manifest in the Buddhist

Tibetan tradition. It is clear some parallels exist in other eastern traditions: Kali in Jindu iconography, is a near likeness to Dorje Palmo, and the Chinese Kuan Yin streams with the same energy as White Tara. Around the world, various aspects of female energy are depicted in religious representations; these representations sanctify, and give permission regarding the energies they embody. Religious participants, practioners of varying belief systems are encouraged to experience the wide range of human emotions, intellectual nuances and physical energies as part of the holy life force which underlies, sustains and transforms all manifestation.

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