

Chapter II

Accessing the Divine in the Female Psyche

*That which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet.
—William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet*

Most scholars agree that the first humans recognized God as a woman. Just think how it must have seemed to prehistoric humans. To them, women were creatures whose bodies mysteriously moved in rhythm with the moon. They were mysterious beings that could bleed freely without dying, awesome humans that could create new life and push it out into the world. How magical they must have seemed!

The Great Goddess was once universally worshipped as the Creatrix and the Divine Energy -- or at the very least, She shared that responsibility on an equal footing with a male deity. She was to be systematically demoted, even dismembered. Her place as the supreme deity was usurped by her unruly lovers and her sons.

With all those sky gods floating around, it is no wonder today's woman has a hard time when it comes to recognizing the divine within herself. Or, as Laurie Sue Brockway so aptly stated, "It would be easier to believe that we too were made in God's image, if, instead of a long gray beard, the Divine occasionally wore a little lipstick." Laurie Sue's delightful essay on the feminine divine appears in its entirety as the foreword.

There is no one prescribed way to access the divine feminine, no single Goddess Path that we all must travel. Though many seek and find the Goddess through

worship, she does not demand that we worship her, creating altars in our homes, seeking her out in her temples, or dancing naked in the moonlight in a sacred grove.

Whether we seek to find the female face of God or simply to connect with the ancient lessons of women's power in ways that instruct and entertain, the Goddess awaits us with open arms. The goddesses will not be presented here as objects of worship, but as universal forces in the human psyche that influence our thoughts, feelings, and actions—forces that can help you in life-affirming ways.

Close your eyes for a moment. Now think of your life as if it were a stage play. You are the director, but there is no script, only an outline. Very little has been written out for you to follow. The play is an improvisation; it will have to just 'evolve.'

Your cast includes several actresses, each a goddess archetype playing a different role. One actress (your personal goddess type) will play the lead and be onstage most of the time since she is your strongest most experienced performer. However, you will be calling the others onstage occasionally when the play suddenly takes a direction that demands their 'special' skills or characteristics.

Already present in your personality, these goddesses can be called into play to help you adapt and grow. Which goddess is active at any given time depends on a combination of factors, including the situation you find yourself facing, your stage of life, and even your hormones! How large a cast and which goddesses you have in your repertoire, your predisposition to use your personal 'favorites' and your conscious decisions about when to call them onstage will determine the success of your production.

One woman's cast might lead with a goddess sweet and gentle. Waiting backstage is an outrageous, wild and sexy one who is studiously ignoring a bossy, judgmental one who is in the corner scowling at the rest. In addition, another

character that is lurking backstage is so horrible and frightening that we won't even talk about her here, though you will meet her later in this book.

Deep in the unconscious mind of each human lives such a cast of characters. They are called archetypes (pronounced ar'key type). They are dynamic images that propel us to act in specific ways.

The idea of archetypes is actually an ancient one, usually ascribed to the Greek philosopher Plato who referred to them as 'forms' and described them as templates for ideals and other abstractions. A rose, Plato might argue, is a manifestation of the Form of Beauty. The form we call Beauty may reveal itself in many ways—as a sunset, a painting, or a person—but Beauty, the form itself, is timeless and does not change. It is universal, present in all cultures and throughout all time.

Were it not for the famous 20th century psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung, Plato's conception of the Forms might have survived only as a subject for debate in the college classroom. Jung, like his colleague Sigmund Freud, believed in the existence of a psychic system that 'drove' the personality.

Unlike Freud, who called this system the libido and felt it was composed largely of sexual energies, Jung likened it to instincts. He felt it was a part of the personality that was even deeper than the subconscious mind, one that was a collective memory of the experience of the human race.

Noticing the consistency of themes in the dreams of his patients and their striking resemblance to those he found in the symbols, myths, and imagery from different lands and epochs, Jung reached the conclusion that the human personality was predisposed from birth to develop in a certain direction. He theorized that we inherit an inborn supply of archetypes that, like Plato's Forms, were universal.

Archetypes are inner images, present in the unconscious mind—universal images like “mother,” “hero,” “goddess,” “witch,” and “trickster”. They are the stuff of myths and fairy tales—artistic images—the characters that populate our movies and our books, and many symbols we encounter in our dreams.

Jung argued that the archetypes were equivalent to the instincts of other animals, conduits for the flow of that primal psychological energy we often refer to as the life force. According to Jung, archetypes function as predispositions in the personality, driving our motivations, beliefs, values, emotions and behavior.

Recent technological advances have allowed us to start the important job of ‘mapping’ the functions of the human brain. To date this research lends credence to the idea that each of us is neurologically hard-wired to respond to our environment in certain ways.

As inner guides that exist in your personality, the goddess archetypes influence how you behave, how you think and feel, and how you relate to others. They are inner images that embody characteristics and experiences that are universal, found in every culture regardless of geography or time. They are responsible for the persistent themes we see surfacing in our own lives.

Archetypes are also a source of spiritual wisdom and authenticity that, when activated, give a sense of meaning to our lives.

Recent interest in archetypes blossomed after the publication of Jean Shinoda Bolen’s best-selling book *Goddesses in Everywoman* in 1985. She expanded on the work of Carl Jung in asserting that once we learn to recognize these archetypal forces within ourselves, they can be called forth to empower us and enrich our lives.

By nature, we each have a certain temperament—certain inborn characteristics. Your goddess archetype is the goddess who exhibits most closely a temperament

like yours. The goddess who represents your personal goddess archetype exemplifies this disposition. This shared temperament is evidenced in how you both behave, how you think and feel, and how you relate to others.

A woman would be wise to make the acquaintance of her archetype, the goddess who has given her the divine spark that establishes the patterns of her life. But how does a woman go about identifying and accessing her own goddess archetype? After all, there are literally thousands of them.

The goddesses are universal. They are celebrated in every culture, though under different names of course. They all have stories that we, as women, can relate to. This book will introduce you to numerous different goddess archetypes that embody the traits that empower us in our contemporary times. Many of them are Greek.

The Greek goddesses garner a lot of attention. They are the superstars of the goddess world, the one whose names we recognize or at least sound vaguely familiar. How was it they rose to the top of the 'pop charts' while other goddesses who are equally deserving languish in obscurity?

They had press agents, of course. The Greek goddesses arose in a culture that enthusiastically embraced the written word, encasing their myths in a media that guaranteed their portability to other cultures and into the distant future.

Fame, however, always comes at a cost. Like the modern-day celebrity, what we read about a goddess may not accurately reflect the 'real' goddess as the one the ancients knew. Much of the original character and power of her myths was lost in translation when her stories were reshaped in the hands of the emerging patriarchies and religions.

Though the stories of the Greek goddesses have been reshaped, at least they

have survived. Sadly, our knowledge of the myths from many other cultures is scanty. Many goddess stories have never been recorded although they are kept alive by storytelling. Others have been lost in the mists of time, especially those from cultures without strong literary traditions.

The invasion of European explorers, conquerors, and missionaries and the uncontrollable diseases that accompanied them endangered the very survival of the priceless lore of the native peoples of North and South America. As the ranks of 'memorizers', the storytellers and keepers of the old ways were decimated, their lessons were gravely threatened.

Understandably, Native American leaders are sometimes reluctant to share the lore of their deities. They ask that, in respect for the losses their cultures have suffered, the spiritual knowledge of the 'old ways' be allowed to remain within their keeping.

Likewise, the myths of many of the delightful African goddesses seem brief and rather bare, stripped of the glorious detail they surely once contained—a great loss resulting from the enslavement and dispersal of the African peoples and the resulting disruption of their rich oral traditions.

Other goddesses have not garnered much attention because their myths have 'lost something in translation'; the values and philosophies that render a legend so beautiful or meaningful in an eastern culture can be difficult for the western mind to perceive.

Consider the Asian goddess Mazu (Ma-Tsu). Scholars claim that she is the goddess who is most widely and actively worshipped in the world today. Over one million persons attend her festivals and shrines each year. Yet few of us in the Western world even recognize her name.

But it is to the Greek goddesses we will turn to demonstrate the major archetypes. The Greek goddesses have entranced poets, philosophers, and artists for centuries. Greek goddesses occupy a central place, not only in Greek mythology, but also in western civilization. With the roots of western civilization grounded firmly in the soil of ancient Greece, it is hardly surprising that the names and stories of these fascinating females are the ones most familiar to us in the western world.

Their myths are used to illustrate the enduring and universal feminine traits that are, to this day, the 'stuff' of art, literature and even 'pop culture.' Their stories remain compelling—a vital part of the very fabric of our lives. These legendary ladies live on—their reflections seen in the patterns of the lives of contemporary women.

Gotta love 'em! These tiara-toting gals were the original wild women and the first Ya-Ya Sisterhood. They've even shaped our expectations of celebrities—no one was particularly surprised when Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis in her later years continued to live out the life of the Atalanta we had always suspected she was. Nor were we shocked to see Oprah 'digging in like Demeter' to win her battle against the beef industry.

The goddesses have given us many gifts, not the least of which are the very words that we use daily. Take, for example, the words "hours," "fate," "democracy," "psychological," "aphrodisiac," "dawn," "amusement," "erotic," "echo," "ambrosia," "pallid" and "memory," not to mention the more mundane like "amazon.com" and "Nike"!

Since the goddess stories that are passed on in the mythology of human cultures embody the expression of female character types, they provide us with a rich and fascinating way to gain access to the personal archetypes that are active in our own lives.

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