

Goddess Spirituality

Alternative titles: paganism, neo-paganism, druidry, goddess worship, wicca, witch, great goddess religion, fairy path, Gaia consciousness, shamanism

Introduction

The nature of goddess consciousness is one that is not etched in stone, but fluid and organic in every aspect of belief and ritual. It is the least understood and most reviled religion, yet it is also the oldest system of belief. The Great Goddess religion was the first religion, believed to originate 30,000 years ago. All subsequent sister beliefs are linked directly to an ongoing legacy of God the mother in some form or another, albeit through modalities today found less in divinity and more in popular art. Our modern culture mostly envisions the original goddess in fairy tales, marginalized mothers and over-sexualized daughters and though, far less, in some aspects, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. Archetypes can also be designated as a reflection of goddess image. That said, in the last one hundred years, with the advent of depth psychology, we have learned a lot about our submersion of the goddess within our psyches. Through art, dreams and story the goddess is still very much abundant in our lives. As Carl Jung once said, *the psyche is over two million years old. Nothing in the psyche is lost.*

To call the goddess religion earth-centered is limiting because originally the goddess was represented in the heavens, the earth and the underworld. One reason we have such a direct but lesser known heritage is because everything in nature and the heavens can be specifically linked to a goddess symbol. Stone, tree, ocean, flower, bird; sometimes the most simplest and common natural elements found in everything from the bible to a fairy tale was once a symbol of a goddess.

Likewise, the seasons, combined with the earliest concepts of agriculture, created a holistic perception of goddess immanent in the cyclical unfolding story of the eternal return of each season. Such immanence meant that the earth was both a tomb and womb. The goddess's body was considered the same earth which receives the deceased in the grave is also the earth that provides the nourishment for the food we grow. Earth-based spirituality means that heaven, or a place for deity/spirit, is not found above our heads and away from the planet but one that exists among us. Likewise, the underworld is not a penal colony but a sacred and vital place in the drama of rebirth for the deity, myth and life in perpetuity.

During the Neolithic (8,000- 3,000 BCE) myths evolved denoting a goddess who travels from heaven to earth to underworld in continual fashion, as virgin, mother and crone. Goddesses discovered in classical myth and other well known collections often have longer lost legacies which many refer to, notably, as *the great goddess*, where the common classical or modern understanding of a particular goddess is but a marginalized splintered view of the whole of the elements she once used to

represent or possess. During the Iron and Bronze Age (2500BCE-500BCE) it became common to observe goddesses being tricked out of their power or special talents, being incorporated into new religions as a supportive role (Hera is a good example), as a battle goddess (Athena is one) and as a saint (Celtic Bridget is a good example) to name a few. Also, as goddesses lost their original strengths, some of their noted power became suspect.

Aspects of Religious Practice

Deity

Deity is any goddess from any age, location or culture. Goddess can be the center of the worship, drama, myth and/or ritual. Exploration of her representations, features, symbols, stories and art are all included.

Methods of worshipping the goddess include raising energy (charging), invocation, prayer, chant, storytelling, magic, divination, meditation and intentional direction. Timing can include feast day, season, time of day, etc., or any other value associated with goddess's storyline.

Wheel of Year:

During the Neolithic, goddess culture developed a system of yearly observances in the form of equinoxes and solstice. Through time another layer of observance was introduced, notably, "fire festivals," the 4 holy days that fall between equinoxes and solstices. Note, these are solar observations from different cultures to reflect the parallel between the goddesses journey and the agriculture one. Though much of it can vary from place to place and era to era, the storyline of the goddess is cyclical. The wheel of the year touches on the agricultural themes as they intersect with the goddess's role. Each season pertains to a specific time and event in the goddess's on-going drama of life:

Imbolc (February 1). Animals are stirring out of hibernation and the sun is lasting longer in the sky. Young maiden goddess emerges as the bringer of Spring.

Ostara (Spring Equinox) Around March 21. The maiden is growing and returns from the dark to bring the light and warmth of spring's rebirth.

Beltane (May 1). Seed meets soil, sky meets earth, animals are mating to renew the universe.

Litha (Summer Solstice) Around June 21. The high point of the sun's energy, the longest day of the year. The goddess and her lover find the most happiness and then her lover is lost.

Lammas (August 1). The goddess gives birth to the vegetation god. First harvest, the harvest of the grain (bread).

Mabon (Autumn Equinox) Around September 21. The Goddess descends into the underworld for her darkly sojourn. Second harvest. Grape harvest, vine harvest.

Samhain (October 31) The Crone parts the veils between the worlds for those who seek wisdom. Third and last harvest. Harvest of the animals.

Winter Solstice (Around December 21). The child is born from the darkness and the cycle continues. Celebrate the return of the light.

Sacred Space

For every gathering/ritual and space to worship, there is a circle created for the worshippers to sit, either on chairs, tufts (pillows) or the ground. The circle is decorated with seasonally appropriate gifts of nature (i.e., boughs of pine and holly for winter solstice, sunflowers for summer solstice). Usually priestesses take turns being the leader. The selected leader for a particular circle gathering will create, design her own ritual of the night. She may ask for help for any number of activities during the ritual. Circles are preferred usually outdoors, weather permitting. In each of the four directions there are symbols of what the direction symbolizes:

East: (Air and mental acuity) Feathers, clouds, bird imagery. Colors can include white, blue and purple.

South: (Fire and will/energy) reptiles, cinnamon sticks, red candles, orange or yellow foods.

West (Water and emotion/feelings/dreams) water animals, colors of aqua and shells.

North (Earth and wisdom/manifestation of work) all land animals, trees, pinecones, nuts, mountains. Colors include brown and green.

Circle decoration can be in art form, sound, or actually natural materials. The circle is both opened and closed by acknowledging a particular goddess and each of the directions.

Goals of circle

- Empowerment
- Connecting with like minds
- Connection to group work
- Higher good
- Healing self or others
- Shift of consciousness
- Shift of awareness
- Connecting to bigger picture or higher power

Truths of Goddess Worship

- Nature and the heavens are sacred and directly influence the development of our myths and stories of the human journey, are tied to our consciousness, sub-conscious, our survival and our general wellbeing;
- Women's bodies are holy and belong to women. Sexuality is understood in context of a greater whole;
- This religion does not subscribe to the language of sin, yet believes in karma – what energy (positive or negative) you give will be the same you receive;
- Honors mind, body, spirit and emotion equally;
- Seeks balance of female and male energies - men and women are co-creators of the universe;
- Religion was created 30,000 years ago
- Holy days are every 6 weeks, metaphorical for the agricultural year as well as the story of the God/Goddess in her guises of Maiden, Mother and Crone;
- Goddess is a personality, personification of something found in nature or the heavens, an energy force, an attribute of the self, or 'Lady of Countless Names.' She encompasses earth and heavens. Her earth aspect is as important as her heavenly aspect;
- There is a direct correlation between the healing of the earth and the status of women. The two are intrinsically linked;
- We are part of the interconnectedness of everything in nature; what we do to nature we do to ourselves, and
- Knowledge and practice of goddess ritual helps us to love our bodies, our selves and our self-image.

Sources

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