



Temple
of the
Goddess

Handbook

Temple of the Goddess
P.O. Box 660021
Arcadia, CA 91066
818-771-5778
info@TempleoftheGoddess.org

Guiding Principles of Temple of the Goddess

- ☞ We believe that every person is the living embodiment of the Divine and a manifestation of Divine Immanence.
- ☞ We respect that every person is their own spiritual authority and no one can define the Sacred and Divine for any one else.
- ☞ We recognize that there are many paths to the Divine, symbolized by the many "goddesses" and "gods" of all cultures and all lands.
- ☞ We support an ideology and spirituality of partnership of relations based on equality, reciprocity, and caring as opposed to domination and control.
- ☞ Though we recognize the Divine in many forms, the focus of that which we call the Divine is manifested in the feminine as "Goddess".
- ☞ We respect and love Mother Earth, Gaia, as a sacred entity who is part of and connected to a vast living cosmos. We believe She is immanent in all of nature, life, and the cycles of life. We honor the interdependence of the web of all existence of which we are each a strand.
- ☞ We believe the loss of the feminine consciousness and ideologies have caused near irreparable damage to humanity and the planet; and we believe that emergence of the feminine consciousness, in balance with the masculine, is the greatest hope for humanity and the planet.
- ☞ The feminine consciousness is the ability to create, nurture and enhance life, and therefore respecting the feminine nature in all beings and in all aspects of life has the power to greatly enhance healing and our quality of life on this planet, and conversely, disrespecting the feminine has and can cause damage to all of life because of its interconnectedness.
- ☞ We accept the abundant goodness of creation which purports that all beings are meant to live in joy, love, and harmony.
- ☞ We believe in a morality and ethics in which the primary imperative is to harm none.

“The world of humanity is possessed of two wings:
the male and the female.
So long as these two wings
are not equivalent in strength,
the bird will not fly.”

Abdul-Baha

Table Of Contents

What is Religion?	1
Goddess and Paganism: The Old Religion	3
Who Is The Goddess?	6
An Ancient Perspective	8
The Legacy of the Goddess	10
The Goddess Underground	12
Goddess Awakening	15
Goddess as Earth, Nature and Life	17
Kicked out of the Garden	18
Separating Spirit from Matter (Mother)	19
The Lost Feminine	20
Reclaiming the Garden	21
Ritual as Worship	22
What is Ritual?	23
Why do we do Ritual?	24
Elements of Ritual	25
Ritual and the Art of Alchemy	26
The Ethics of Ritual	26
Goddess in Ritual	26
Activating an Archetype	27
Actualizing an Archetype	28
The Power of Intention	29
Enactment	29
Symbols	29
Endowing The Symbols	30
A Time To Every Purpose	30
Additional Correspondences	31
Ritual Bathing	32
Ritual Dress	32
Ritual Purifying Herbs	32
Creating Sacred Space	33
Candles	33
Sound	34
Movement	34
Casting the Circle	34
Ritual Guidelines	35
Preparation	35
Opening	36
Enactment	40
Closing	40
The Magic of Ritual	41
Sabbats: Holy Days of the Wheel of the Year	42
Suggested Reading List	51
Endnotes	71



Minoan Snake Goddess
from Knossos, Crete
C. 1600 B.C.E.

Evidence from this ancient civilization indicates that Crete is most likely the last known society that lived in partnership. Men and women worked, played, and worshiped together co-creating their world in a spirit of cooperation. The people of Knossos worshiped the Divine Feminine, She who is known as the Goddess.

What Is Religion?

Was there ever a subject more volatile than that of Religion? Countless wars have been fought over it. Millions and millions of people have died for it. Countries have been subjugated because of it. Entire nations, tribes and communities have been wiped out. And all in the name of . . . Religion.

But what is religion? Is it dogma? "Prescribed doctrine, specific tenets, authoritative principles, established beliefs?"¹ And established by whom? Is it Liturgy? "A collection of formularies for public worship, a particular arrangement of service?"² Or could it be tradition? "The handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs from generation to generation; a long-established or inherited way of thinking or acting, a body of laws or doctrines?"³ Tradition doesn't carry with it the volatility of history and colonialism as does religion. But is one tradition of "statements, beliefs, legends, and customs" apply to everyone the world over? Is that one tradition to become the religion of all? Or is religion simply spirituality? "Pertaining to the spirit or soul."⁴

According to historian Barbara Walker the word religion is derived from the Latin **religio** which means, "re-linking or reunion." Then what, pray tell, are we "re-linking" to? What is our Source, our Cosmic Roots? What, whom are we created from? Could everyone's Source be different and right for them? If we could prove there is a Divine Source, what would the Divine be?

And are we made in the likeness of the Divine? Or is the Divine made in the likeness that we create Her/Him to be? The truth is as hard to grasp as water through desperate fingers. Desperate, to contain and claim the "One Truth." As if another's truth could somehow invalidate our own belief or take something away from us. What arrogance for any of us to believe we know "The Truth" of the Divine. Maybe the Divine, the "Source" is as diverse as all the peoples of the Earth. Maybe each person must re-link to a Source that, in the end, provides them with sustenance, comfort and peace.

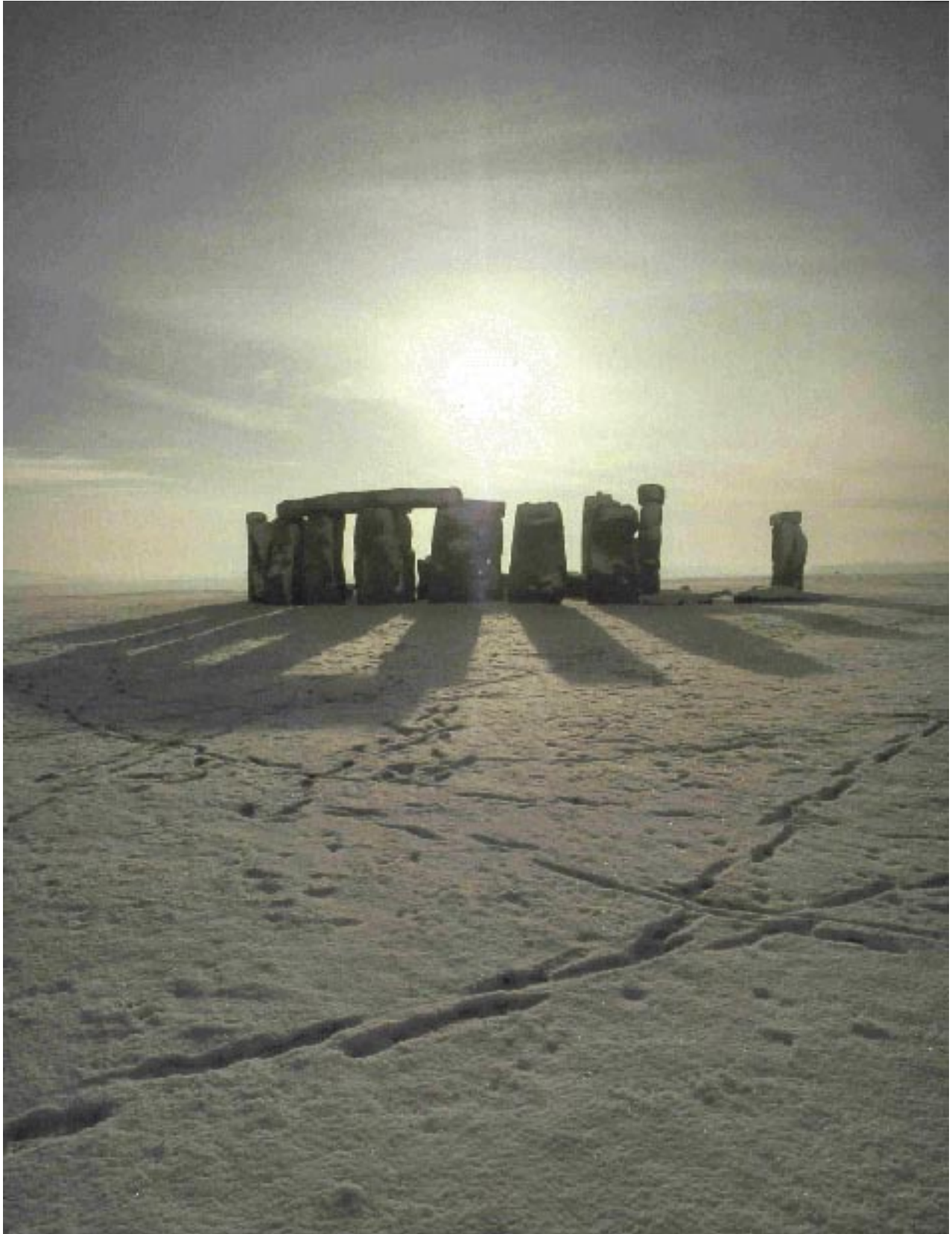
One person re-links when they pray the Rosary and another when they light the Menorah. Someone else re-links to their source listening to the song of a stream surrounded by the comfort of trees. For still another, re-linking to Creation might be found in the serenity of their sleeping child's face.

All are right. All are profound.

In music, in the sea, in a flower, in a leaf,
in an act of kindness...I see what people call God
in all these things.

Pablo Casals

Goddess and Paganism: The Old Religion



The extent to which Paganism is misunderstood never ceases to be a surprise. With the revelation that one is a "pagan" the question that inevitably follows with pity and disbelief is, "Oh, you have no religion?" Then comes the deep, quieting breath before launching into what has now become an almost practiced litany. Paganism **is** a religion, the oldest religion in the world. In fact it is often referred to as "The Old Religion" dating back about 25,000 years. The term "The Old Religion" describes the pre-Christian religion of much of western and northern Europe which was based on the agricultural cycles and the rhythms of the Earth.

Through countless images sketched on cave walls, we look at the past with eyes that see partnerships between men and women. We see the hunt and the honoring of the herds. We also see male shamans dressed in skins and horns in identification with the God and the herds, as well as the female priestesses embodying the fertility of the **Goddess**.

That's where we began and here we are now -- Pagan, defined by Webster as "a heathen (contrasted with Christian or Jew), a person who has no religion." However, the etymology of Pagan is Latin pagani meaning country-dwellers, the rural people whose religious conservatism caused them to be faithful to the "old gods and goddesses" of Europe (Barbara Walker). Heathen came from the Germanic heiden, that which is hidden, because these same rural people were officially forbidden the rites of the old deities, yet clinging to their beliefs, the Pagan people continued their rites in secret.

Paganism refers to any earth-centered, earth-based religion. This includes the spirituality of most indigenous people. Studies of various spiritual traditions of the Americas show many similarities with the indigenous spiritual tradition of old Europe known as Paganism.

In the past two or three decades much has been written about Paganism. But we have no Bible, no Torah or Bhagavad Gita to claim as a central truth. Truth, ephemeral as it is, is revealed from within. Most that has been written in the last 2,000 - 3,000 years has been destroyed. This destruction culminated with the deaths of an estimated million people (mostly women) now referred to as "the burning times." This female holocaust began around 1126 CE (Current Era) and went on throughout Europe for nearly five centuries. Only recently with the deciphering of cuneiform have we reclaimed the more ancient mythology of Sumer which dates back about 3,500 B. C. E. (Before Current Era). These early Pagans "were an enterprising and cooperative folk that had a complex religious ideology" (Whence The Goddesses by Miriam Dexter) teaching us a lot about our own spiritual evolution.

Most of the teachings of Paganism have been passed down—mother to daughter and father to son. Probably the single most important tenet is the philosophy of **immanence** which is the belief that the world and everything in it is alive; that the Creative Life Force that courses through us also exists in everyone and everything. The Earth is a living being, an organism made of an intricate "WebWork" comprising oceans, air, animals, rocks and plants all dependent on one another. This too is true of the Moon, whose lunar pull controls the ebb and flow of the tides on Earth. It applies as well to the Sun, Stars, and Planets informing us of the interconnectedness of the entire Universe.

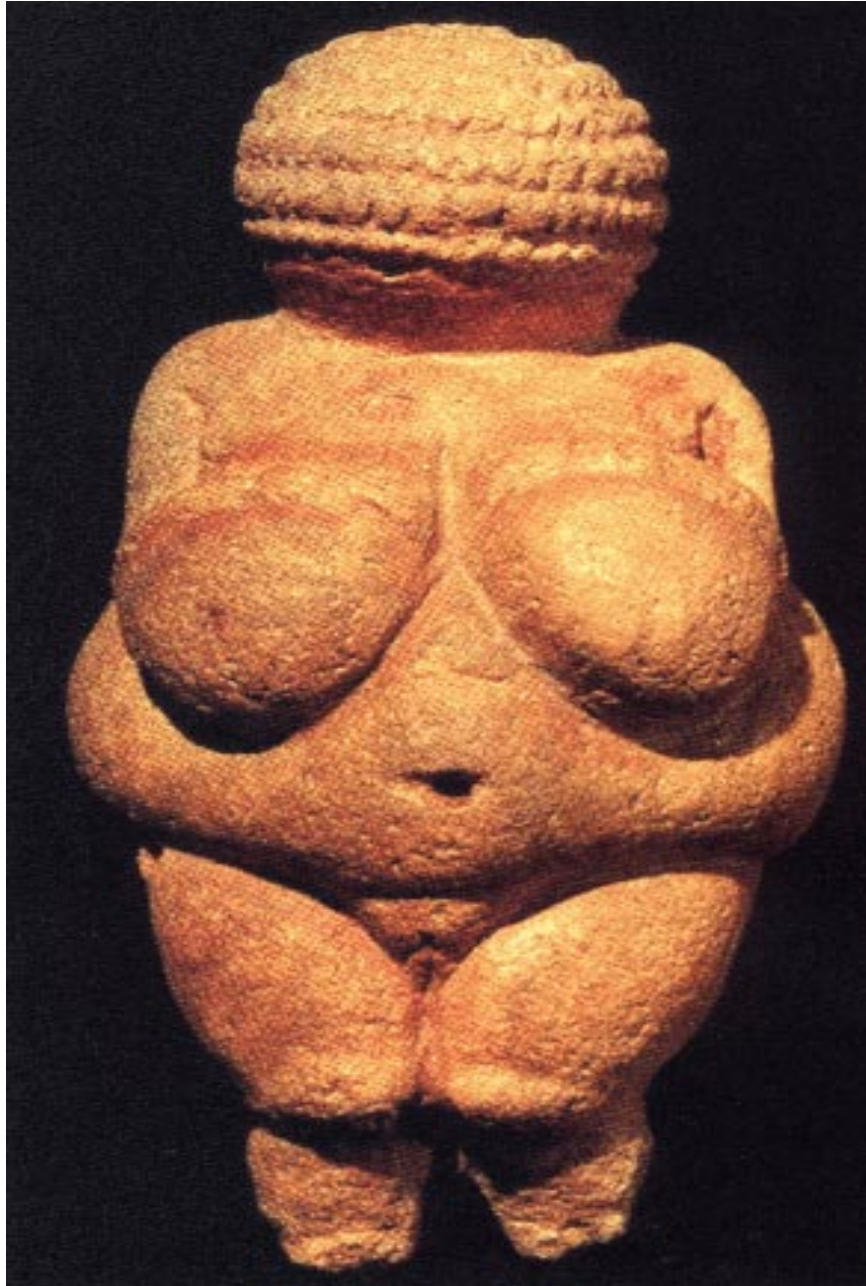
Paganism is a religion of celebration, not redemption. These celebrations take place within "the Wheel of the Year," an ancient and sacred ritual calendar marking the Earth's changing seasons and the Sun's never-ending journey across the sky, as well as the Moon's waxing and waning cycles. Each holiday, or Sabbat, brings joy and good times along with deeply felt spiritual, cultural, and ecological meaning. The Wheel represents the life cycle of continual birth, death, and renewal as expressed in the changing seasons. These changing seasons also represent a psychological "map of consciousness" facilitating human growth. They contain the framework for personal transformation, rites of passage, healing, empowerment, and manifestation.

In addition to the Wheel of the Year, Pagans use spiritual techniques such as Shamanism and Magic. Shamanism is a technique used for healing and acquiring knowledge through forays into "non-ordinary reality" and is being used fairly extensively by therapists and counselors. These forays known as "journeying" are usually aided by repetitive drumming, and often involves interaction with "power animals" ([The Way of the Shaman](#) by Michael Harner). The technique of Magic or "the art of changing consciousness at will" involves prayer, rituals, and affirmations in combination with the Wheel of the Year. Author Dion Fortune describes Magic as "a change of consciousness brought about through a deliberate act of will." This creates self-empowerment or as writer Starhawk describes it in [Dreaming The Dark](#), "power-within rather than power-over."

There are no commandments, but two creeds have been passed down that most Pagans acknowledge and adhere to. They are (1) "And doing what you will, harm none.", and (2) "All that you say and do will come back to you three times over." Pagans ascribe "evil" to individual intent, i.e., a knife in the hands of a surgeon becomes an instrument for healing, the same knife in the hands of a murderer is an instrument for killing. It's the **ethics of the individual** who wields the knife that creates the evil.

In addition to the important mandate of environmental activism as a religious responsibility, the manifestation of Divinity in female form, as **Goddess**, carries the most potential for impact upon our society and the world today.

Who is the Goddess?



Venus Of Willendorf
Willendorf, Austria
c. 24,000 - 22,000 bce

Early Paleolithic “Stone Age” Art

“Who is Goddess?” Some people might conjure an image of Marilyn Monroe, goddess of the silver screen, whose beauty and vulnerability seemed to represent femininity in an acceptable, nonthreatening way to both men and women. Many picture Botticelli’s lovely Venus rising on a pristine shell from the depths of the ocean. Still others have a vague memory from early school days of the bickering, petty pantheon of later Greek and Roman goddesses studied in literature and Western civilization classes. These are not the strong images and stories needed to inspire and guide women today.

Thanks to our foremothers, many women around the world have acquired the power to express themselves as never before in recorded history. In the United States, we have the right to vote, to affect the political body of the society we live in. We have, to a great extent, control of our own bodies and birth functions. The power of the feminine grew and amplified during World War II, when women were patriotically called into factories to do the work of the men who were off to war. We found we not only could do the same jobs, and just as well, but liked the challenge which enhanced and fulfilled something within. Once women found this expression of themselves that involved challenge outside the home, they were reluctant to give it up. Economically, however, working outside the home is no longer a choice for most women and their families. And so we added “working woman” to the ever-expanding litany of women’s job titles and found it did not take away from our roles as wife and mother.

Women are now faced with the task of balancing and integrating the many and varied aspects of themselves. Where do we look for the archetypes that will mirror this multifaceted picture of femininity, the guides that will reflect the process of deep integration? Do we look to the legacy of fairy tales, with their wicked stepmothers (the mothers are always dead) and their defenseless daughters? Who is the role model we seek? Is it the stepmother, she who strives for youth and beauty, two aspects of seeming power that women in our culture are valued for? Or do we look to the defenseless daughter, she who passively waits for her prince to come and rescue her?

And who is the missing mother? Perhaps it is she we are searching for -- a portrait of woman so full, so complete, so threatening that she has been deliberately exiled, banished, killed off.

History, which as we are told it, usually begins with Western civilization, has recorded few of the contributions females have made to society. Most of what we are taught in school is void of the accomplishments of women. Instead, we are inundated with tales of commerce and industry; overwhelmed with the exploits of conquerors and kings. Many women grow up and graduate from school believing we are a powerless afterthought.

So where do we find the images, role models, archetypes who will heal and inspire women in the twenty-first century? Many women and men are reaching back into the period of history prior to the rise of Western civilization to see what existed before. We are reclaiming an ancient legacy that can change our lives and our relationships, and gives us hope for the future of both the planet and the people.

I recently had an enlightening conversation with a friend and coworker. We were talking about “this time before,” and she said with great incredulity, “I know this sounds crazy, but I just accepted, as fact, that history began four thousand years ago. I thought the Bible took us to the beginning of time.” My friend is an intelligent, well-read, articulate woman. She has a Ph.D. and teaches in her field, yet she too was caught in the cultural trance that postulates that humanity’s existence extends only through Western civilization (Greek and Roman) or Judeo-Christian biblical history. If we acknowledge prehistory at all, we think in erroneous images of cavemen and dinosaurs-uncultured, primitive, unthinking violence.

The last Ice Age reached its zenith about 16,000 B.C.E. (Before the Common Era). What existed in those fourteen thousand years between that date and 2,000 B.C.E.? Babies don’t emerge from their mothers full-grown; likewise, humans didn’t simply turn a corner and civilization automatically appeared. What were those toddler years like for humanity? What kind of societies did they create? What were the mythologies that governed their culture, and how did these mythologies affect the way men and women related to each another?

AN ANCIENT PERSPECTIVE

In her groundbreaking book *The Spiral Dance*, feminist writer Starhawk paints a different picture of our early ancestors:

“According to our legends . . . more than 35 thousand years ago, when the temperature of Europe began to drop and the great sheets of ice crept slowly south in their last advance. Across the rich tundra, teeming with animal life, small groups of hunters followed the free-running reindeer and the thundering bison. They were armed with only the most primitive of weapons, but some among the clans were gifted, could “call” the herds to a cliffside or a pit, where a few beasts, in willing sacrifice, would let themselves be trapped. These gifted shamans could attune themselves to the spirits of the herds, and in so doing they became aware of the pulsating rhythm that infuses all life . . . They did not phrase this insight intellectually, but in images: the Mother Goddess, the birthgiver, who brings into existence all life; and the Horned God, hunter and hunted, who eternally passes through the gates of death that new life may go on.”⁵

These people danced with death every day of their lives, and I doubt they ever took the gift of life for granted. They must have had great reverence for life, nature, and women, who possess the seemingly supernatural power of bringing forth life.

The mother represented the life, death, and renewal cycles reflected in the waxing and waning cycles of the moon. The female body must have seemed like great magic to these people who lived completely dependent on nature. In *Whence the Goddesses*, Miriam Robbins Dexter, Ph.D., says, “Woman per se was probably believed to have potent, even ‘magical’ powers of fertility, and her birth-giving powers on a personal scale mirrored the feminine principle of birth and regeneration on a cosmic scale.”⁶ Still today, we recognize and acknowledge the magnificence of the pregnant female body, though we can now explain it, even reduce it to sterile, medical terms.

In *Modern Maturity*, Native American activist, author, and actor Russell Means relates a story his grandfather told him: "A long time ago the people were sitting around the fire. Pretty soon the men came to watch the women grow with child and when they watched, they witnessed the miracle of life, birth itself, live birth, the miracle of created life. Then they looked at one another. That's how my grandfather's story ended: **Then they looked at one another.**"⁷

A woman bleeds, without being cut, in harmony with the moon. She holds the egg within her womb, waiting for the instant of creative merging, then grows the new life within. The two bodies live as one, hearts beating in rhythm. The mother breathes and eats for her baby until at last she is called to face the warrior's ultimate test of courage. Risking death, she willingly stands at the threshold of worlds to bring forth new life. Her moon blood then magically transmutes into milk to feed her newborn. This "miracle of life" that we too often take for granted must have affected our ancestors like nothing else in their world.

In the same article, Means explains that the famous Sun Dance ritual was created to help men come into balance with the female; that the ceremonies were developed to bring understanding to the men and boys of what it's like to give birth. He goes on to describe the Sun Dance and compares it to the ritual of birth and labor:

"We dance the Sun Dance for four days, facing the sun, following the sun, all day, sunup to sundown. During those four days and nights we do not eat or drink water so we can try to begin to understand the suffering of pregnancy. You see, when you eat food it has to go to two people. The body starts relying on itself within." "Eating itself," the interviewer says. "Yeah, exactly, for protein. It starts eating the muscles. On the fourth day we pierce our chests, maybe even our backs, to understand the pain and the giving of flesh and blood the woman goes through. The ceremony's about coming into balance with the female. The piercing is about trying to understand birth."⁸

Means' recounting of how the indigenous people of America have recognized and honored women—the life givers—for the courage and selfless love they demonstrate in bringing forth new life provides a clear picture of how our early ancestors probably viewed females in pre-historic and early historic periods of civilization. The logical thing to do when envisioning an anthropomorphized deity would be to make her female. "The idea of the Goddess is related to the fact that you're born from your mother," says Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth*.⁹

Interviewer Bill Moyers questioned Campbell about the reverence that early societies accorded the Goddess figure, the Great Goddess, the mother earth. Campbell responded, "The human woman gives birth just as the earth gives birth to the plants. She gives nourishment, as the plants do. So woman magic and earth magic are the same. They are related. And the personification of the energy that gives birth to forms and nourishes forms is properly female. And when you have a Goddess as the creator, it's her own body that is the universe. She is identical with the universe."¹⁰

So when these early people thought of a supreme deity, it's not surprising that they imaged the creator as female. Indeed, thousands of female figurines, some dating back as far as 30,000 B.C.E., have been unearthed all over prehistoric Europe. These images reflect the religious minds of our early western ancestors. In fact, "twenty times more female figurines than male figurines have been excavated from Neolithic European sites thus far."¹¹ (The Neolithic is estimated to be the era between 7000 and 3000 B.C.E.)

Unfortunately, early scholars reduced these magnificent, large-hipped, often pregnant sculptures to mere expressions of prehistoric male erotica. But led by University of California professor Marija Gimbutas, many scholars, including British archaeologist James Mellaart, have challenged those conclusions and argue that, on the contrary, the Goddess figurines were intended for the purpose of worship.

What is the social, cultural, or historical importance of these thousands of prehistoric sculptures, found over a widespread geographical region? What do they tell us about our distant past, and how early humans revered the feminine and the cosmos she represented? Most important, what do they reveal about the way men and women related to and treated each other in those early developing societies? These ancient female sculptures, along with wall paintings and cave and burial sites, are essential parts of the psychological and cultural landscape of our ancestors. It seems the female was not only revered as the life-giving force, but she played an important part in understanding the cycle of death and rebirth, as well. Based on this ancient wisdom, death was not an end, but a path—a passageway—to a new cycle of life.

Anthropologists, archaeologists and historians learn a great deal about our predecessors by the style of grave and burial sites, and by the equipment found in there. Based on Gimbutas' extensive work, Riane Eisler, in her book *The Chalice and the Blade*, explains this important association with the feminine to our early ancestors by referring to a burial site in Les Eyzies, France, where in a rock shelter known as Cro-Magnon, the first skeletal remains of our Upper Paleolithic ancestors were discovered in 1868 (the Paleolithic era was earlier than the Neolithic). Eisler says, "around and on the corpses were carefully arranged cowrie shells. These shells, shaped in the form of what (religious historian) E.O. James discreetly calls 'the portal through which a child enters the world' seem to have been associated with some kind of early worship of a female deity." She reiterates the resurrection theme by recounting, "Both the ritualized placement of the vagina-shaped cowrie shells around and on the dead and the practice of coating these shells and/or the dead with red ochre pigment (symbolizing the vitalizing power of blood) appear to have been part of funerary rites intended to bring the deceased back through re-birth."¹² Red ochre was used to signify and honor the life-giving menstrual blood of woman—a far different perspective from today's view of menstruation as "the curse."

THE LEGACY OF THE GODDESS

What were these societies like that revered the feminine—both the earth, which was seen as the ultimate life-giver, and woman, who stood at the doorway between this world and the spirit world? We have sought out and thrilled to stories of Atlantis and other legends of an earlier time, when people lived in harmony, beauty, and peace. Are these just stories, or are they memories in our collective unconscious? Eisler, in speaking of this time "when the wisdom of the mother was still honored and followed above all" cites the ancient Greek Poet Hesiod who "wrote of a 'golden race' who tilled the soil in 'peaceful ease' before a 'lesser race' brought in their god of war."¹³ She is quick to point out, however, that while scholars agree that these works are likely rooted in prehistoric events, allusions to an age when men and women lived together in peace and harmony are usually seen as mere fantasy.

Archaeological excavations during the past four or five decades, as well as reinterpretations of older digs using more advanced scientific dating procedures, have revised the way we view our past. Now we know that the European late Paleolithic and Neolithic were “a long period of peace and prosperity when our social, technological, and cultural evolution moved upward: many thousands of years when all the basic technologies on which civilization is built were developed in societies that were not male dominant, violent, and hierarchic.”¹⁴

Citing the lack of archaeological findings of heavy-duty weapons, warfare, fortifications, or defensive structures in the recent Old European sites, such as those of Neolithic southeastern Europe, Gimbutas asserts that these Goddess worshipers lived in peaceful societies; villages were located for their beautiful settings rather than defensive purposes. These early people “lived in an egalitarian society, very probably in a matrilinear system, had virtually no weapons except in the last (Copper Age) stage, and indulged in arts and crafts, stimulated by their ideology and mythical imagery.”¹⁵

Instead of fortresses, they built splendid homes and temples decorated with exquisitely beautiful art. One ancient city has been partially uncovered at Catal Hhyhk in Turkey. While only one acre of the thirty-two-acre site has been excavated, it appears that one-third of the buildings were temples or shrines¹⁶. Gimbutas’ findings, along with those of others, have changed forever the portrait previously held of early humans. Her investigations and research have destroyed once and for all the clichéd image of our ancestors as uncivilized, primitive cave-men dragging women off by their hair.

Eisler characterizes these peaceful, prosperous societies—which developed language, writing and advanced methods of agriculture, medicine, art, and architecture—as “partnership societies.” This model of society is in stark contrast to the “dominator” model we now find ourselves entrenched in.

Study of humanity’s past and present can help point us to a promising new direction for the future. In reexamining human society from a gender-holistic perspective, Eisler has created a new theory of cultural evolution called **cultural transformation**. This theory suggests that there are two main paradigms for society. The **dominator** model, based on ranking, is commonly referred to as either patriarchal or matriarchal. The **partnership** model, by contrast, is based on the principle of linking of social relations.

In the partnership paradigm of linking, diversity (being different, whether it be male/female or black/white), does not equate to good/bad or superior/inferior. In contrast, the modality of ranking—one people over another, one quality better than another—has trapped us in a mythology (and society) of polarities and dualities.

The cultural transformation theory goes on to suggest that the original cultural evolution was toward a partnership paradigm, and that these partnership societies arose in a linear manner “unbroken by destructions or disruptions . . . and without major cataclysms”¹⁷ for almost three millennia. The implications of this information are staggering. What would our society be like today if the last four thousand years had been like the three that came before, if there had been no crusades, no battles, no wars—of any scale—waged for millennia? We are so enculturated to accept confrontation as the norm that the mind struggles to grasp the possibility of what our lives could be like without the history of conflicts we have endured and participated in since 2000 B.C.E.

THE GODDESS UNDERGROUND

If, indeed, our original cultural evolution took place within a partnership paradigm, what was the social shift that moved us toward a dominator society? In one of her many important papers, "The Three Waves of the Steppe People into Old Europe," Gimbutas explains that the dissolution of this society, known as the Old European, was brought about by invaders she termed Kurgans (based on a word meaning "barrow," a reference to the graves they were buried in), seminomadic horse-riding pastoralists from the Russian Steppes, who migrated into Old Europe beginning about five thousand years ago. She describes the archaeological changes found after the appearance of the Kurgans:

"the towns and villages disintegrated, the magnificent painted pottery vanished; so did the shrines, frescoes, sculptures, symbols, and script. The taste for beauty and the sophistication of style and execution withered. The drastic upheaval of Old Europe is evident in the archeological record not only by the abrupt absence of the magnificent painted pottery and figurines . . . but by the equally abrupt appearance of thrusting weapons, horses—and subsequently vehicles." [The arrival of the invaders] "initiated a dramatic shift in the prehistory of Europe—a change in social structure, in residence patterns, in art, and in religion—and was a decisive factor in the formation of the Europe of the last five thousand years."¹⁸

Gimbutas contrasts the ideologies that evolved from these two vastly different cultures and compares the symbols and deities they produced. The Kurgans were nomadic, patriarchal, ranked, and warlike, and their symbology and ideology were "centered on the virile male, heroic warrior gods of the shining and thunderous sky."¹⁹ On the other hand, the Old Europeans, differing dramatically, were sedentary, peaceful, egalitarian, and matrilinear, and their spiritual ideology was manifested in the "eternal aspects of birth, death and regeneration, symbolized by the feminine principle, a Mother Creatrix."²⁰

Unlike the North American continent, which was vanquished—through conquest, migration, and assimilation—over a period of only a few hundred years, the invasion of Old Europe approximately two thousand years. This process, which began in east-central Europe and continued throughout all of central Europe, is estimated to have taken place between 4300 B.C.E. and 2800 B.C.E. The central and western Mediterranean regions, Crete and the Aegean islands did not see the process of invasion that their European neighbors endured until more than a thousand years later, about 1500 B.C.E.

The Kurgans are often referred to as Indo-European, a term that reflects the geographic area ranging from India to Europe that was conquered by the invaders. But Gimbutas more accurately refers to these invaders as Proto-Indo-European, reserving Indo-European to describe the hybridization of cultures—the preexisting Indic and European peoples with the nomadic invaders. Included among these nomadic invaders, who were ruled by warriors and priests, are the ancestors of "the Semitic people we call the Hebrews, who came from the deserts of the south and invaded Canaan."²¹ Eisler categorizes the Semites with the Kurgans, based not so much on cultural contacts and bloodlines as on the social system they had in common—the dominator model, whose attributes include hierarchy, violence, authoritarianism, and male dominance.

At this point in history (2000 to 1500 B.C.E.), we usually find an assimilation of cultures, rather than a complete replacement of the old by the new. But as Gimbutas points out in *The Language of the Goddess*, "Because the androcentric (male-centered) ideology of the Indo-Europeans was that of the new ruling class, it has come down to us as the 'official' belief system of ancient Europe."²² Instead, the religion of the indigenous people, the worship of the Goddess and her sacred rites, went underground. Officially, the Goddess was no longer viewed as the primary source of life, but was assimilated into the conquerors' pantheon of deities as a wife or daughter, subservient to the whims of the ruling male deity. From earliest times, the Goddess was worshiped as the supreme life-giving force, until she was dethroned, assimilated, and assigned a place of lesser power as seen in the Greek and Roman pantheon of deities.

So, the Old European societies experienced an almost total cultural devolution. Those who "worshiped the life-generating and nurturing powers of the universe—in our time still symbolized by the ancient chalice or grail" were conquered and assimilated by "those who worshiped 'the lethal power of the blade'—the power to take rather than give life that is the ultimate power to establish and enforce domination."²³

The centuries that mark the beginning of this current era found religion and politics becoming intimate bed-mates. In 312 C.E. the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity at the Battle of Milan. Shortly thereafter he issued a proclamation known as the Edict of Milan in 313 C.E. which promised tolerance to all religions including the fledgling but didactic cult of Christianity. Though tolerant of other religions Constantine favored the Christian sect called Catholic, meaning "universal," above all other religions. The growth and prominence of the newly sanctioned Catholic church provided his recently united empire with much needed stability.

In an effort to achieve unity in ecclesiastical affairs of the many Christian sects, Constantine convened the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E. to reconcile disputed points of faith. Unfortunately, codifying the many divergent branches of Christianity was the beginning of the end of religious toleration which was soon abandoned entirely when the Catholic bishops were given the power to define a body of beliefs, tenets, and dogmas which would be accepted as "orthodox." The church continued to grow and be favored by Constantine's successors but it was in the reign of Theodosius (379-395 C.E.) that Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire and destruction of Pagan temples was legalized. In 381 C.E. another council was held in Constantinople to further define orthodoxy and the Catholic Church was given the mandate to suppress all other religions (Theodosian Code XVI.1.2).

In the wake of this active mandate of religious suppression, the new state religion grew at a phenomenal rate over the coming centuries as the mission to convert "the heathens" to the *one true religion* was pursued with a radical and destructive fanaticism. Superstition became prolific as the image of evil grew in the form of the Christian devil who was seen everywhere. Numerous papal bulls, laws, were created to deal with heretics (unbelievers) and witches—those who were accused of worshiping the newly created Satan.

The supposed "devil-worshippers" were purported to call on him to cause even the most mundane mishaps of daily life such as drying up the cow's milk of a troublesome neighbor. A manic fear erupted throughout the now Christianized Europe which lasted for centuries. This fear eventually found potent form when the church sanctioned and legitimized a papal bull called *The Malleus Maleficarum*²⁴, "*The Hammer of Witches*," a handbook for witch hunters.

According to the *Malleus*, the three major crimes of witchcraft were the use and advocacy of birth control, performing abortions, and most absurdly, robbing a man of his virility. In *Witches: A Psychoanalytical Exploration of the Killing of Women*, author Evelyn Heinemann says, "The fact that the witch theory increasingly assumed that witches belonged to the female sex must definitely be seen as being grounded in an ecclesiastical tradition which had always proclaimed the inferiority of women. The explanation of why women became the major victims of witch persecutions can be seen in the Church's misogynistic attitude."²⁵

Over the course of several hundred years, the fear-based hysteria directed at women who were disparagingly called "witches" became known as the *Inquisition* and more recently called the *Burning Times*. During the several hundred years known as the *Burning Times* there are estimated to be between 900,000 to one million, mostly women, murdered throughout Europe. The Inquisition used many methods of torture and death that included, but were not limited to, burning at the stake. There were also many recorded deaths by stoning, hanging, and deliberate drowning that accounted for the numbers of murdered women. While most of these executions were conducted under civil authority, they were nonetheless sanctioned and frequently directed by the church. However, Heinemann goes on to say, "it is not sufficient to see witch persecutions exclusively as a result of the church's misogyny." We must ask, "In what way did the population support the authorities in the campaign against women? A possible explanation seems to be the fear of women."²⁶

Literacy, during this time, was the exclusive domain of the church. The aristocrats were educated but were, of course, taught by the church. Consequently, outside the church and civil authority there is little documentation left from this mostly illiterate time but there is enough to complete a horrific picture of the fear of women that led to this ugly period of our human history.

In the last decade controversies have arisen about the actual number of women murdered with the low end being 150,000 and the high end being nine million. The truth probably lies in the more moderate estimate of one million. This little-known but important part of world history has taken on mythological proportions because of the impact that so many millennia of female hatred and oppression has consciously and unconsciously bred into women.

What we have left is little documentation and a powerful but fact-based myth about the *Burning Times* that resonates with countless women worldwide, even inciting the often repeated mantra of "never again" among many women. Joseph Campbell says that mythology is truer than history because history is just a kind of journalism. Mythology captures the imagination, the dreams, the aspirations, the longings, the yearnings, and most importantly, the beliefs of civilizations and cultures.

Beyond the controversy of numbers; whether 150,000 died or one million or more; whether by burning or hanging or stoning; no matter the time span over which it took place, it can undoubtedly be concluded that this was indeed a *female holocaust*²⁷, as defined by Webster, "any reckless destruction of life."

The most specific change in the status of the goddess in Europe came about with the new Christian religion. The goddess took on the face of the Virgin Mary as the Church of Rome sought to convert the goddess-worshipping Pagans. Pagan holy days, such as Easter, were usurped by the ruling religious body in order to lure the heathens away from their days of

worship of the goddess and her springtime fertility rites. During this time a Pagan was simply anyone who was not a Christian or Jew. It usually referred to someone who observed a polytheistic religion, such as the ancient Romans and Greeks. Even today Webster defines Pagan²⁸ as “a person who is not a Christian, Jew or Muslim; a heathen.” When the political rulers of the largest empire in the then known world made their newly chosen religion the official state religion, they opened the door for condemnation and extermination of all other religions and belief systems.

This prejudice against the spiritual beliefs of indigenous cultures spread globally as the ruling monarchies of Europe devoted their resources to world-wide imperialism and colonialism. More often than not the conquering soldiers traveled the “new world” in tandem with priests in order to convert the “savages.” Most indigenous cultures held beliefs which generally included at least reverence, if not worship, of the goddess or the divine feminine represented as the earth mother.

For many decades knowledge of the Goddess has been emerging from the underground into the light. Numerous books (see the Bibliography) in the fields of history, mythology, anthropology, archaeology, and women’s studies recount the millennia-old story of the Goddess. To find out more in-depth information about the worship of the divine feminine and how her worship has been suppressed and forced to go underground you can avail yourself of the plethora of material that has come out in the last fifty years as well as new material being published every year. As the sophistication of conducting archeological digs evolves and the methods for interpreting previous sites and ancient materials continues to develop, more and more of humanity’s past is being uncovered. No doubt what will continue to be revealed is the extent of the roles of women in cultures around the world and how the divine feminine, or lack of the divine feminine, deeply influenced the world and humanity.

GODDESS AWAKENING

Humanity stands at the dawn of a new millennia with global information at our fingertips. There are now countless men and women who, when thinking of a nurturing, life-giving, creative presence—a deity who loves unconditionally—inevitably envision a maternal presence. It naturally follows that for us, the Great Mother is the heart of our worship and prayers. The Goddess is the feminine expression of Divinity. Numerous people have found the Goddess as a result of a long, arduous spiritual search.

The Goddess offers a spirituality, a tradition, a religion of celebration and regeneration in this world, rather than an other-world redemption. Through Gaia, the Earth Mother, she reveals to us the beauty and magnificence of our own divine nature. We see her countenance reflected in the play of the ocean, the majesty of a tree, the dancing colors of a sunset. In those moments we celebrate our oneness with nature and know, undoubtedly, our own amazing divinity.

In *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, a collection of feminist essays, theologian Carol Christ’s brilliant discourse titled “Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections” states, “The simplest and most basic meaning of

the symbol of Goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power." The woman who has reclaimed the Goddess "is saying that the divine principle, the saving and sustaining power, is in herself, that she will no longer look to men or male figures as saviors."²⁹ The lineage of a "male savior" mythology is in abundant evidence in contemporary fairy tales. In most of those stories, we find the obedient daughter passively waiting for her prince to come and rescue her.

Women's spirituality is the natural offspring of feminism. As women continue to break the barriers restricting us, as we take our place in the world as the true partners we were meant to be, we have sought a symbol for this powerful feminine energy. After achieving economic and political empowerment, many women are turning within and seeking spiritual empowerment. What we've found is that the concept and imagery of a male God is no longer adequate to represent us on a spiritual plane. We discovered (some might say remembered) the rich, multi-cultural, many-faceted Goddess known since ancient times as "She of Ten Thousand Names." Awakening to the knowledge of Goddess and Goddess "herstory" dissolves the patriarchal distortions that restrict women in countless ways.

Others have reclaimed the archetype of the Great Goddess as the symbol of women's growing power both in themselves and in the world at large. In *Megatrends for Women*, Patricia Aburdene and John Naisbitt state, "Whether a woman espouses traditional religion, New Age spirituality or Atheism, her sense of personal power is enhanced by the mythology of the Goddess, which awakens confidence, belonging and self-esteem."³⁰

Identification with the divine feminine is an unparalleled act of empowerment. Miranda Shaw, discussing the gynocentric view of Tantric Buddhism in *Passionate Enlightenment*, says, "Women must discover the divine female essence within themselves. This should inspire self-respect, confidence, and the 'divine pride' that is necessary to traverse the tantric path. This pride is an antidote to self-doubt and discouragement. . . .When a woman reclaims her divine identity, she does not need to seek outer sources of approval, for a bottomless reservoir of self-esteem emanates from the depths of her own being."³¹

Modern women have taken up the ancient symbol of the Goddess as an emblem of their own undeniable feminine power. As the collective unconscious continues to awaken to this timeless and essential archetype, society will once again have a context for the balance needed to heal both the planet and the fractured psychological landscape of society.

Psychologists and other therapists are looking at the various archetypes of goddesses as a tool for understanding the psyche of women and how they develop relationships. In *Goddesses in Everywoman*, Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., creates an extraordinary psychological picture, based on the better-known pantheon of Greek goddesses, by means of which women can begin to look at the energies and patterns in their lives. "Knowledge of the 'goddesses' provides women with a means of understanding themselves and their relationships with men and women, with their parents, lovers, and children. These goddess patterns also offer insights into what is motivating (even compelling), frustrating, or satisfying to some women and not to others."³² This is a new psychological perspective based on the diversity of women as opposed to previous theories that sought to define what a "normal" woman is. This important work, along with others such as Clarissa Pinkola Estes's book *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, has given women stories and ancient archetypes by which we can begin to understand ourselves.

GODDESS AS EARTH, NATURE, AND LIFE

The Goddess is both the One and the Many. As the One, she is all of creation—the cosmos, the universe, and nature herself. As the Many, she manifests in myriad forms. From all over the world, she reveals herself to us by many different names. She is Isis, Aphrodite, Inanna, Pele, Yemaya, Shakti, Kali-Ma . . . literally “She of Ten Thousand Names.”

Many religious studies highlight the similarities of primordial creation legends: that a self-created Mother Goddess gives birth to all other life. In Greece, Gaia—known as the Primeval Prophetess—was ancient Earth, and from her came the universe, including all the gods and mankind. A priest of Egypt said, “It was Neith, the mighty mother, who gave birth to Ra; she was the first to give birth to anything, she did so when nothing else had been born, and she herself had never been born.” In India, Aditi was the self-created Mother of all mortals and immortals. To the Hopi, Spider-Woman spun creation out of herself. In Australia, the Aborigine goddess Yhi created her mate, Baiame, and together they created all the animals and humans. Across the globe, countless societies trace their ultimate roots to the Great Mother.

Gaia, the Goddess in one of her many ancient forms, is in essence, the planet Earth itself. Vice President Al Gore, in *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, says,

The spiritual sense of our place in nature predates Native American cultures; increasingly it can be traced to the origins of human civilization. A growing number of anthropologists and archaeomythologists, such as Marija Gimbutas and Riane Eisler, argue that the prevailing ideology of belief in prehistoric Europe and much of the world was based on the worship of a single earth goddess, who was assumed to be the fount of all life and who radiated harmony among all living things.³³

Human consciousness is once again awakening to the Earth as a living entity. For eons the mythology of the Goddess has been identified with the Earth. The Goddess inspired reverence and honor for the planet from those who worshiped Her. “Even the male establishment must concede that the Goddess’s life-affirming values of cooperation and creativity are key to human survival.”³⁴ As more and more people discover the mythology of the Goddess, we can create the great change needed to heal the Earth—the body of our Mother.

In *The Myth of the Goddess*, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford take us on a fascinating journey of Goddess exploration. What they found in the course of their investigation is both astonishing and heartening. Their research showed “such surprising similarities and parallels in all the goddess myths of apparently unrelated cultures that we concluded that there had been a continuous transmission of images throughout history . . . the underlying vision expressed in all the variety of goddess images is constant: the vision of life as a living unity.”³⁵ These discoveries reinforce the connection drawn between the mythology of the Goddess and the Earth as a living entity.

KICKED OUT OF THE GARDEN

Awareness of our mythological connection to the Goddess is vital to the survival of the planet and all its children—the different species (plant, animal, and human). For too long we have lived with a creation mythology that has disconnected nature from humans. Our *primary creation mythology* in the West is one that expels us from the Garden and charges us with the task of dominating nature rather than being the caretakers of the earth. Western society is unique in that it is the *only* society given this divine edict—to dominate rather than care for our Mother, our planet. This same mythology also initiated the concept of hierarchy (including both sexism and racism) with the mandate of placing woman “under” man, and separating the light from the dark (a scripture often quoted by Ku Klux Klan members to justify separation of the races).³⁶

This Western creation mythology is startling compared with findings that verify the existence worldwide of creation mythologies based on the Goddess that connect all of life and hold it sacred rather than separate and disparage life. “The Mother Goddess, wherever she is found, is an image that inspires and focuses a perception of the universe as an organic, alive and sacred whole, in which humanity, the Earth and all life on Earth participate as ‘her children.’ Everything is woven together in one cosmic web, where all orders of manifest and unmanifest life are related, because all share in the sanctity of the original source.”³⁷

The cosmology that envisions all of life as connected like the strands of a web has been validated by the emergence of the new sciences; “for, beginning with Heisenberg and Einstein, physicists were claiming that in subatomic physics the universe could be understood only as a unity.”³⁸ For many people, the Goddess is now conceived not necessarily as inherently female, but in terms of what that feminine expression has embodied: the concept of life as a whole intricately woven together in sacred unity. This vision makes environmental activism not only desirable, but necessarily a religious responsibility. We were not kicked out of Gaia’s garden; rather, we were given the charge to be caretakers of this amazing place we call Earth.

While ancient earth-loving societies can be termed matrifocal (social groups organized around women) and can certainly be classified as matrilineal (relationships descending through the female line), there is no evidence that they were ever matriarchal, that is, dominated–governed and ruled–by women. The womb, by virtue of its ability to birth both male and female, provides its own checks and balances of power. (When a woman, *in a gender-healthy society*, spends nine months gestating and growing a baby, then gives birth and nurses that human life from her own body, she does not then divide the genders and make one more valuable than the other.) The early Goddess-worshipping, matrifocal societies therefore differ greatly in their values, ideals and relationships from the conquering, dominator societies that came later, those who worshiped warlike male deities.

SEPARATING SPIRIT FROM MATTER (MOTHER)

As the centuries passed, the once-supreme creative matrix lost more and more of her place in our lives. As the people who worshiped her were conquered and forced to adopt (or adapt to) the religious beliefs of their conquerors (much like the indigenous people of the Americas), the "Goddess became almost exclusively associated with 'Nature' as the chaotic force to be mastered, and the God took the role of conquering or ordering nature from his counterpole of 'Spirit.'"³⁹

This split in consciousness, which contains the mythological roots of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—the three major patriarchal religions of the world today—can be traced to a popular Babylonian epic known throughout the ancient world as *Enuma Elish* (ca. 2000 B.C.E.). The story of *Enuma Elish* recounts the defeat of the original mother goddess, Tiamat, by her great-great-grandson, Marduk. Tiamat, the Babylonian creation goddess, was seen as the primordial ocean womb whose fertile depths birthed every living thing—including a younger generation of gods who then sought to overthrow the older generation. In this epic, Tiamat is portrayed as a great serpent or dragon (both ancient images of the feminine).

After the conquest and murder of Tiamat, the life-giving nature deity who created him, Marduk uses her body to form creation:

He split her like a shellfish into two parts:
Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky . . .
He heaped up a mountain over Tiamat's head,
pierced her eyes to form the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates,
and heaped similar mountains over her dug, which he pierced to make the rivers
from the eastern mountains that flow into the Tigris.
Her tail he bent up into the sky to make the Milky Way,
and her crotch he used to support the sky.⁴⁰

The original myth, which portrayed the Creatrix birthing everything from herself, so that she was part of and one with all of creation, was thus transformed into a myth that suggests that "the lord" makes creation (and from her body no less). For the first time, "the god becomes the maker of heaven and earth whereas the goddess was heaven and earth. The concept of 'making' is radically different from 'being,' in the sense that what is made is not necessarily of the same substance as its maker, and may be conceived as inferior to him; while what emerges from the mother is necessarily part of her and she of it."⁴¹

With the acceptance and perpetuation of the Marduk myth, a new order of creation was initiated whereby the feminine, symbolized as the Goddess, became synonymous with the realm of nature as something wild, dark, mysterious, chaotic, and dangerous. Marduk then represented the new "spiritual" order of male deities whose religious imperative was to conquer and order nature. This concept created a split that still affects society today. This creation myth, which became doctrine, is an early example of "priestly politics, whereby the mythology of an earlier age and culture is completely inverted, so that the divinities of an earlier era are named demons and the divinities of the new order are exalted to a position of supremacy."⁴²

While much of the symbology in the Judeo-Christian belief system is based on ancient, sacred Goddess mythology (including the Garden, the snake, the tree), our Western paradigm (by which I mean Judeo-Christian beliefs) is descended from this Babylonian creation myth, which places strong emphasis on the opposition between spirit and nature (implying explicitly that nature is not alive and contains no spirit). This symbology has left us a heritage of thinking in duality and oppositions. "We find this . . . in the common assumption that the spiritual and the physical worlds are different in kind, an assumption that . . . separates mind from matter, soul from body, thinking from feeling, intellect from intuition and reason from instinct . . . in addition, the 'spiritual' pole of these dualisms is valued as 'higher' than the 'physical' pole."⁴³

THE LOST FEMININE

The polarization of spirit and matter has unavoidably resulted in an imbalance of the masculine and feminine principles. Because our myths implicitly dictate our culture, it is no coincidence that our Western paradigm, with the looming chasm of the lost feminine, has desacralized nature. The feminine principle, which is symbolized by and embodied within the Goddess, must be retrieved from the recesses of our human consciousness.

Many of the wrongs and injustices in our society today, as well as the destruction of the planet, can be traced directly to the lost feminine. Attributes in **both men and women** that are commonly labeled feminine—such as relational, creative, intuitive, cooperative, and nurturing—are neglected in males and often disparaged in females, leading to a psychological imbalance. The paradigm of Western society is based on a hierarchical, dominator point of view that overlooks the balance and value that integrating masculine and feminine aspects can bring to a society based on equality and partnership.

The devaluing of the feminine in our patriarchal, dominator society has not only hurt women, but wrought untold damage on our sons, our brothers, our fathers, our lovers, and our husbands. It is important to understand that the manifestation of Divinity in female form carries unimaginable potential for impact on our society. Reclaiming and restoring the feminine is crucial to the survival of the human race, and the planet as we know it. The feminine principle, as an aspect of human consciousness, must be retrieved, integrated, and brought back into full complementary balance with the masculine principle if we are ever to achieve a harmonious balance between these two basic and essential ways of experiencing life. Ultimately, and always, by healing the mothers (women in our society) we will also be able to heal the imbalance suffered by men . . . our sons, husbands, fathers, brothers, and lovers.

As we start a new millennium, we once again find ourselves at a pivotal point in cultural evolution. We have nearly decimated the planet in our drive to dominate and control the forces of nature. We have displaced and destroyed millions of people in the pursuit of conquest. The social fabric of our society has been devastated by the strangulation of domination. The fear used to control humanity for the past four thousand years has finally turned on itself and is destroying our society and our children.

RECLAIMING THE GARDEN

How do we stop this death-wielding power machine? Is it possible to maneuver our way through the traps the machine has laid and find a new evolutionary path? How do we weave together the disparate parts of our dualistic natures? Have we learned yet that strength is not equated with conquest and domination? How do we integrate the equally necessary qualities of strength and nurturing, logic and intuition, spirit and nature, mind and matter? Can we find the balance needed at this crucial moment in the preservation and life of the planet? Is it possible for males and females of all races, religions, and economic backgrounds to join hands and discover the goddess in each of us and pour forth the healing waters of balance from the never-diminishing grail of love? Can we make of this earth the garden it once was?

Francis Hodgson Burnett's book *The Secret Garden* is a brilliant tale depicting the deep healing that can take place with the retrieval of the lost feminine. Mary, the story's vibrant heroine, confesses early on, "I've stolen a garden. . . It isn't mine. It isn't anybody's. Nobody wants it, nobody cares for it, nobody ever goes into it."⁴⁵ Much like the feminine in our society, which no one seems to want or care for, Mary's garden has been abandoned and neglected. Psychologist Dr. Gloria Avrech says of this classic story, written around the beginning of the twentieth century, "The problem it depicts seems to relate to the absence, neglect and disdain of the Feminine, Great Mother, and matriarchal consciousness in the psyche and in our lives."⁴⁶

Mary, forced to play outside, begins to explore the grounds around the manor where she has been brought to live, and encounters a robin. "The robin, like a power animal, leads our young, wounded healer and future shaman to an enclosed garden behind a locked door. On an inner level, the wounded feminine ego, represented by Mary, can be seen as beginning to connect to nature and her instincts, which connecting process can bring about a restored connection to the Self."⁴⁷ Mary, as shaman and healer, goes on to bring the same kind of wholeness to her cousin Colin and his father, Lord Craven, through restoration of the lost feminine.

An enclosed secret garden is a strong archetypal image found in countless legends, folklore, and myths. "A dormant garden can be a beautiful image for the potential life-giving, protective, containing, nurturing qualities of the positive aspects of the Great Mother archetype."⁴⁸

Like most all fairy tales and fables, this story, too, has a happy ending. Comforting the crying Mary, Lord Craven declares, "You brought us back to life, Mary. You did something I thought no one could do."⁴⁹ The lost feminine now restored, the garden is once again open, alive, and awake. Mary poignantly sums up her journey with "***If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden.***"⁵⁰

Ritual As Worship

What is Ritual?

Why do we do Ritual?

Transmutation: Why We Need Ritual

Alchemy: a method or power of transmutation; the seemingly miraculous change of a thing into something better.

Webster

Ritual has been part of the human experience since the beginning of time. Our lives are filled with *unconscious* rituals that mark our days and add warmth, texture, and meaning to our existence. Reading the morning paper over coffee, walking the dog in the evening, and saying good night to our children with a song or bedtime story all become important, ritualized moments in the course of our everyday lives. Rituals are an integral part of the psyche; they connect us to others, to our own inner processes, and to that something which is greater than ourselves. Yet somehow, somewhere we lost our *conscious* connection to the healing power of ritual. Undoubtedly, we have become a society that is ritually impoverished.

Ritual is a vital part of human health, but we have reduced this aspect of our vitality to a few, scattered traditional ceremonies such as birthdays, graduations, weddings, and christenings—ceremonies that unfortunately, have lost much of their meaning. It's no wonder the human condition is as it is today. We are bereft of the healing power of ritual and myth. As a result we seek to fill our spiritual emptiness with drugs of all kinds—from crack to consumerism to cookies—none of which endows us with the important, meaningful support needed to enhance our lives and support our personal evolution.

Eminent mythologist Joseph Campbell points out in *The Power of Myth* that "if you want to find out what it means to have a society without rituals . . . read the news of the day . . . [you'll find] destructive and violent acts by young people who don't know how to behave in a civilized society."⁵¹ The proliferation of gangs in the past few decades is evidence of a culture lacking in mythology and the appropriate rites of passage for young people. A closer look at the structure of gangs reveals many of the elements associated with the human imperative known as ritual. For instance, they have ritual clothing and colors, music, language, symbols—repetitive signs and hand gestures—and connection to community or family. Because nature abhors a vacuum of any kind, these youths have fulfilled an important human need by creating rituals based on a mythology that, unfortunately, clearly reflects American society today—a mythology of death, dominance, and destruction.

Ritual is the formula, the recipe, for cellular alchemy. It provides a psychic pathway for transmutation to take place. Ritual done to its fullest involves the whole person—the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual bodies. It encompasses the totality of the human expression, and the layers of meaningful action amplify the experience, thereby creating the potential for a deeper, cellular transformation than could ever be accomplished from, say, simply repeating an affirmation alone. Author and medical anthropologist Dr. Alberto Villoldo, in discussing this phenomenon, explains that the part of the human brain known as the limbic system, which houses all of the mechanisms that regulate physiology, self-healing, and regeneration, does not have direct and conscious dialoguing capabilities, and therefore cannot be influenced by speech and language alone.⁵²

The limbic brain (from Latin *limbus*, meaning "border") is an incredible switchboard where signals travel back and forth on neural pathways between the "lower" parts of the brain (governing instincts, drives, and automatic regulation of body processes) and the cerebral cortex, the "higher" brain (controlling advanced reasoning and planning). According to the *ABC's of the Human Mind*, "In this strategic spot, a kind of crossroads where visceral feelings, cognition, and memory meet, the limbic system helps shape the basic motivations and emotions of our lives."⁵³

The physical enactment of a ritual that has been endowed with highly charged emotions, based on intellectual, well-thought-out goals, and contained within our highest spiritual aspirations has the potential to discharge old neurological circuits and then reprogram, or make new neurological connections.

Ritual can be a great resource for individuals by reinforcing the personal growth accomplished through therapy and other transformative techniques, such as prayer, meditation, dance, astrology, yoga, and dreaming, to name a few. Ritual, in essence, marks the changes in our lives and supports the subtle shifts in our interior landscape as we adjust to those changes. Ritual assists the transformative process, whether it is used to acquire guidance about a needed change, to initiate some desired change, or to celebrate and embrace a completed change.

Humans often use ritual to demarcate beginnings and endings. Rituals create paths to guide us from one stage of being to another; these are commonly called rites of passage. Rituals also connect us with community. Joining with others in ceremony fulfills our human need to belong. It also affirms the timeless commonalities of the human experience. And when a ritual is brought to the most personal level, it becomes a tool for spiritual, emotional, and psychological development. Rituals accelerate personal growth and enable us to connect with the innermost parts of ourselves.

Rituals can be part of a therapeutic process. They contain the framework for personal transformation, rites of passage, healing, empowerment, and manifestation. Rituals can restore us to balance and wholeness, and allow us to make the necessary inner changes when our outer reality has been altered, whether in expected or unexpected ways. They bring clarity and resolution to personal choices and new life directions. They open us to insight, inspiration, and new possibilities. Rituals help us shed what we've outgrown and release whatever no longer affirms our personal evolution.

Ultimately, and most important, ritual brings the sacred into our lives. Rituals require thought and intent, which force us to step away from the accelerated pace that most of us live by and move into a space of timelessness. No matter what your religious beliefs, rituals can enhance the moments of your life by giving focus and attention to those things you have designated as important. They bring a sense of the divine into our lives, and they affirm and enhance our connection to the sacred, however we choose to define it. Campbell explains this connection with the divine in *The Power of Myth*: "A ritual can be defined as an enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are actually experiencing a mythological life. And it's out of that participation that one can learn to live spiritually."⁵⁴

Rituals are a collective way of relating to the divine energies and celebrating them. In the process of celebrating these life-affirming energies, we have the opportunity to practice a form of the ancient art known as alchemy—to change our lives for the better, to create our lives the way we want them to be.

Elements of Ritual

“Magic is the art of causing changes in consciousness according to the will.”

Dion Fortune



RITUAL AND THE ART OF ALCHEMY

If you have become inspired by the idea of Ritual and Goddess, as deity or archetype, and have decided to attend a ritual, speak with the person, or people, who make up your support system for feedback. This could be your therapist, a friend, or a support group you meet with. Examine your reasons for wanting to explore Ritual, its purpose and what you hope to achieve. Conferring with the people in your life who support your growth and evolution will bring added clarity and insight to the work you are doing. Discussing your growth process with those you trust is essential when you begin exploring the art of ritual.

For those of you new to ritual, there are some basic elements of ritual that should be addressed before you go further. Rituals can include things such as honoring or calling in the elements, smudging or incense, and candle lighting, to name a few. For a better understanding of why these components are consistently used, a brief explanation is needed.

THE ETHICS OF RITUAL

As mentioned previously, the path of the Goddess is a tradition of celebration and regeneration. Rituals, too, are a form of celebration and regeneration. There are very few rules connected with the ideology of the feminine. However, there are two axioms that have been passed down and that serve as excellent guides for living. One is *So long as you harm none, do what you will*. The other is, *Whatever you say or do will come back to you three times three*. These two ethical guidelines are very powerful because they make us completely responsible for ourselves and the things we say and do.

While creating the rituals in this book, I urge you to keep in mind that we are all personally responsible for our lives. We may not be able to control the actions of others, but we **can** control our reactions to what others say and do. The purposes of these rituals are healing, celebration, guidance, and empowerment. Self-love and compassion for others go hand in hand. Ultimately, no one is served through acts of vengeance or other negative forces. Intent becomes everything.

GODDESS IN RITUAL

For many women all over the world, the Goddess, by whatever name she is called, is a way of life. She is the spiritual, political, and ritual center of their lives. For these women, relating to the Goddess as a container for change and healing will be easy and natural. While a direct spiritual involvement with the feminine divine will enhance the rituals you create from this book, it is not a prerequisite. If you are new to the concept of Goddess, or you already have your own spiritual practice based on a different theology other than Goddess, you can still use the rituals and recipes in this book by using the mythology of the Goddess, and the Goddess in all her many aspects, as an archetype.

ACTIVATING AN ARCHETYPE

For thousands of years, women have been psychologically splintered and fractured. Men, as well, have been cut off from the vital aspect of the feminine, leaving a great imbalance in our society. By reclaiming the magnificent ancient female archetypes from folklore, forgotten bookshelves, and the recesses of our collective unconscious, we give ourselves permission to make ourselves whole.

An archetype is defined by the dictionary as “the original pattern, or model, from which all other things of the same kind are made; prototype.”⁵⁵ Along more Jungian lines, the idea of an archetype is related to that which is unseen. It is a preexistent form that is part of the structure of the psyche and is manifested in images found in dreams or experiences such as fantasies. These forms are fleshed out and given meaning by the culture in which we live. Archetype are universal in all people’s psyches; everyone has the same form. Many see archetypes as numinous—sacred, inexpressible, mysterious experiences that are associated with the Divine.

People define and experience archetypes in many different ways and on many different levels. While I experience archetypes as sacred, living symbols, they can also be viewed as a psychological construct or a psychological concept that exists in the structure of everyone’s psyche.

My experience of working with archetypes (whether they appear as animal manifestations, cosmic powers, nature forces, or one of the many names and aspects of the Goddess) is that I find myself attracted to and resonating with certain aspects of a particular archetype. Synchronistically, I begin creating or calling to myself the life experiences that will teach me whatever lessons I need to learn at that time. I find myself confronted with and immersed in a specific situation or set of situations that forces me to deal with whatever the archetype is teaching.

For example, Turtle, who easily creates its own boundaries by simply withdrawing into the shell it carries, has taught me the important lessons of maintaining boundaries and self-protection. Turtle has also shown me that its seeming slowness is actually focused deliberateness—taking the time to make well-thought-out choices. I’ve also learned the importance of staying connected to earth energy from Turtle, whose short legs keep it grounded and close to the earth.

Another archetype would be the Goddess Inanna bringing me relational experiences to help me embrace the darker emotions I’ve been avoiding such as anger and rage. Inanna becomes the guide into my inner landscape as we walk through the underworld together in my quest to find and embrace wholeness. The Goddess, as an archetype, can exist as the prototype, the **original pattern of Woman**.

However you choose to experience Goddess—as container (cooking pot) for healing and change—whether she exists for you as a psychological construct or is a divine living symbol—awakening the concept of Goddess within you will probably bring great change to your life. As with any profound awakening, experience with archetypes will most likely stir the deep recesses of your psyche and shine a light into the shadows and hidden places of your heart and mind. You will be confronting that scariest of beasts: **the Self**. You will encounter primal levels of passion, rage, and fear. Many Goddesses are seen as wrathful deities aiming an arrow of

enlightenment, slashing through imposed limitations or debilitating patterns with a sword of truth, or raising a trident of justice against the ignorance of prejudice. The wrath they express is aimed at the negative forces that hold us back, keeping us bound in pain and a state of suffering. It requires great courage and support to confront the Self fearlessly. The path to wholeness is rarely easy.

ACTUALIZING AN ARCHETYPE

The goddesses in this book were drawn from a vast array of female deities that span human history and geography and represent a variety of different cultures. While each of the goddesses in this book is multifaceted, one particular aspect of that deity revealed herself to me, and that is the aspect I wrote about. Some came in the form of poetry, others spoke in short stories, while others became a retelling of an already magnificent story.

It is my hope that as you look through the exquisite artwork in this book and read about these goddesses, one will speak to your heart, resonate in your psyche, and call you to create a ritual for yourself. There are many books that describe each of these deities in greater depth, and if one (or more) of these divine images calls to you, I recommend you do further reading. Meditate and contemplate the qualities that attracted you to a particular image, and how you want a ritual involving that image to help you. The more space you make for archetypes in your life, the more these synchronistic experiences will come to teach you what you need to know in order to make the changes you would like in your life.

Spend time with the pictures and images. Write in a journal about them and how a particular ritual is beckoning you. Before going to sleep at night, ask for dreams that will guide you and awaken you to all the levels that are at work in this area of your life. Write down the dreams in your journal and ask yourself lots of questions. Finding the answers is not the difficult part of personal growth. The real challenge is discovering the right questions.

After you have read about the history, mythology, and spirituality of the Goddess in the first section of this book, it will be easier to understand why we are using Goddess as the container for healing. As in homeopathic healing, like is used to cure like. In order to heal the imbalance of the feminine and masculine in society, we need a strong image, metaphor, or ideal of the feminine. The Goddess is the purest essence of undiluted femininity. Hers will be the image within which we create rituals for healing. The Goddess is the image that will hold or contain the alchemical process of change. She of Ten Thousand Names will embrace, encompass, envelop, and enclose the magic we create.

THE POWER OF INTENTION

Intent is purpose, will, and determination. What you get out of the rituals you create is in exact proportion to what you put into them. The depth and breadth with which you prepare, explore, and create a ritual determines its effectiveness, potency, and end result. As mentioned earlier, *the physical enactment of a ritual that have been endowed with highly charged emotions, based on intellectual, well-thought-out goals, and contained within our highest spiritual aspirations* has the potential to change us on a deep, cellular level. A ritual should involve all aspects of the human experience: the spiritual body, the intellectual body, the emotional body, and the physical body. And it is intent—the will, purpose, and determination with which you engage **all** these aspects of yourself in the enactment of the ritual—that will ultimately create the transmutation you are seeking.

ENACTMENT

To enact is defined by the dictionary as “to make or pass into law; decree; ordain; to represent or perform in; act out.”⁵⁶ All of these meanings can be applied to the enactment of a ritual. By the power of all those aspects of yourself that you bring to ritual; by the belief and commitment with which you endow every ingredient in your ritual; and by the focus of intent with which you act out your ritual you are *decreeing health, ordaining change, passing into law* a new modality of living.

SYMBOLS

A symbol is something that stands for or embodies another thing. It is an object that is used to represent something abstract, a quality or process. A symbol is a token that connects us to people, places, and events, both past and future. A symbol links us to beliefs, ideas, and concepts. Symbols give us access to the memories, longings, and deep emotions tied to their associations.

In *The Art of Ritual*, Renee Beck and Sydney Barbara Metrick state that “symbols have a level of universal meaning and a level of personal meaning. Symbols are the language of the unconscious mind, and according to Jungian psychology there is a personal unconscious (those memories from one’s own history that are not immediately or easily available), as well as a collective unconscious.”⁵⁷ The inherent value of a particular symbol is not the symbol itself, but the effect it produces within us.

Rituals are, by nature, symbolic. They are often free-form, evolving out of intuition and spontaneity set within very loose guidelines. The use of symbols within a ritual gives it form and direction. In this book, the ingredients included in the recipes take on symbolic meanings. *Each ingredient becomes a symbol, and the preparation of the recipe is the ritual itself.* The

symbolic meaning of an ingredient will vary from ritual to ritual. The value assigned to a symbol—an ingredient—is dependent on the needs of a particular ritual, rather than a compulsive need for uniformity and sameness.

There are no rules connected to the use of symbols within this book. For instance, salt in one recipe might be a symbol for purity, while in another recipe it symbolizes the power of love. Intuition plays an important role in the enactment of a ritual. While creating a ritual, your intuition might suggest to you another meaning for an ingredient aside from the one the author has designated. Do not hesitate to go with your intuition and change the symbol to one that is more appropriate to your ritual goal and aims. The effectiveness of the ritual will be better served by a commitment to follow where your intuition leads. A symbol is a representation that enables us to open doorways that lead to change.

ENDOWING THE SYMBOLS

Almost every ingredient, as well as many of the kitchen tools, used in the recipes and rituals has been assigned a quality. Endowing the tools and ingredients with an assigned characteristic or designated quality makes the ritual more meaningful and is appropriate to the context of the ritual. The ingredients then become symbols that are representative of the psychological, emotional, or relational aspects that will be the substance of the alchemical change. **The power that fuels ritual is generated from your psychic and emotional makeup.** The stronger the belief, the stronger the ability to endow an ingredient (a symbol) with a needed quality, the more potent the ritual will be.

A TIME TO EVERY PURPOSE

Choosing the most appropriate time to enact your ritual is important. Allow plenty of time so that you are not rushed. Pick a day when you will be alone without distractions from children, family members, or roommates. Set aside quality time for shopping so you begin to develop a relationship with the food you will be preparing. Make sure you have plenty of time after the ritual to do whatever clearing and processing that will be needed. In the context of ritual, clearing and processing means to take time to think, meditate, and write about your experience. Ultimately, give yourself permission to take time for healing and health.

In addition to making time and space in your daily life, there are additional factors in choosing a time to enact a ritual. While these rituals may be done at any time of the month or year, there are monthly and seasonal cycles of energy that you may want to keep in mind while working with ritual. For those who have made ritual an integral part of their lives, the phases of the moon and the Wheel of the Year—the cycle of the seasons—play an important role. These cycles inform the kinds of rituals most suited to a particular time. In the symbolism of the Wheel of the Year, spring, summer, autumn, and winter signify respectively birth, growth, fading, and death. These seasons of nature reflect the inner seasons of the human landscape

as well. In Goddess spirituality, the spokes of the Wheel are marked by eight sabbats, or holy days. "The Sabbats are the eight points at which we connect the inner and the outer cycles . . . where the seasonal, the celestial, the communal, the creative, and the personal all meet."⁵⁸ The Wheel of the Year is a wonderful support and a useful guide for timing the enactment of rituals. (For a list of sabbats, see Appendix A.)

Like the seasons, the moon is also an indispensable guide and support for rituals. When the moon is waxing (getting fuller), it is a good time to do rituals of "calling in" (praying for) those things we desire, such as the courage to change jobs or careers. Likewise, the waning moon is a time for letting go. We release what no longer serves us as the moon is getting smaller. We might let go of habits or fears that are holding us back. We use the energies of both the moon and the Wheel of the Year to support our process and to add cosmic strength to the work we are doing.

In addition to these cycles, each person has a personal season or cycle. You will want to observe your own ebb and flow, and then use those observations to decide the most appropriate time to enact your ritual. You might check your astrological chart for input as well, for the stars and planets affect the movement of your inner landscape. Numerology can also be used for personal guidance. (See Appendix B for an abbreviated numerological chart.) In the words of both Solomon and songwriter Pete Seeger, "To everything—turn, turn, turn. There is a season—turn, turn, turn. And a time to every purpose under heaven."⁵⁹ The heavenly bodies and the cycle of the seasons turn within as well as without.

ADDITIONAL CORRESPONDENCES

In addition to the cycles mentioned above, there are some basic components, called correspondences, that will aid your understanding and enactment of ritual. Along with the cycle of the seasons, there are many traditions that recognize four basic elements: air(east), fire(south), water(west), and earth(north). These elements and directions are associated with aspects of the human experience. (These associations vary in different traditions.)

- ☞ The east and air are associated with the mind, intellect, wisdom, clarity, logic, knowledge, the spoken word, wind, breath, dawn, new ideas and possibilities, spring, and winged creatures such as the dragonfly, owl, eagle, and phoenix.
- ☞ Fire and the south are connected with the will, passion, courage, transformation, snake, purification by fire, noon, heat, flame, embers, lifeblood, lions, volcanoes, eruptions, sudden change, and summer.
- ☞ Water and the west are identified with emotions, reflection, twilight, psychic abilities, intuition, cleansing, the unconscious, the womb, the moon, menstrual blood, amniotic fluid, fertility, all creatures of water, the ocean, rivers, tides, streams, and fall.
- ☞ The north and earth are related to the physical, manifestation, the body, money or material gain, bull, cow, vegetation, fertility, growth, forests, deer, stag, mountains, caves, bear, bones, silence, midnight, and winter.

Familiarity with these symbols will enhance and spark your own creativity as a ritualist. (See section on Holy Days, Sabbats for more information.)

RITUAL BATHING

Rituals often begin with a bath, a symbolic act of washing away daily routine and the tension of everyday cares. Bathing is relaxing, clears the mind, and signals the body that something is about to begin. In addition, many rituals in this book include bathing as a symbolic cleansing or transformation. When we have undergone a difficult, unpleasant, or challenging experience, a bath or shower can be an act of purification, washing away residual negativities and imparting a sense of renewal. Like a baby leaving the birth waters, we are ready to begin anew.

RITUAL DRESS

The clothing and jewelry you choose for each ritual will add significance and affect the way you approach the ritual experience. They can connect us to people, emotions, and other times and events. The way you dress can symbolically evoke a persona you wish to leave behind, or one you are trying to create. Think carefully and plan ahead what you will wear, and how it will enhance your ritual.

RITUAL PURIFYING HERBS

In many traditions, incense and the burning of herbs are considered part of sacred practice. They are used during ritual or ceremony, for prayer and healing work. When burned, the herbs or incense release their energy and fragrance, but they are not meant for inhalation. Like a ritual bath, we purify ourselves and the space we will be using for ritual purposes with smoke. Native Americans refer to this as "smudging." After lighting the herbs, we fan the smoke over our bodies, ritual objects, and the room where the ritual will take place by directing the smoke with breath, hand, or feathers.

Each incense or herb has its own purpose. There are many comprehensive herbal books that detail the different varieties of herbs and their uses. In this context, we are mainly looking at incense and the cleansing herbs; sage, cedar, and sweet grass are the main herbs used for purification. They clear unhealthy energies from the aura of the body and sanctify the space and ritual tools in preparation for the ritual.

These purifying herbs come in several forms. Sage is usually dried and tied in a bundle called a smudge stick. Sweet grass comes woven in a braid. Both the smudge stick and sweet grass braid can be lit and burned. Cedar leaves, picked from a tree and dried, comes in a small plastic bag and is usually burned on a charcoal. These prepared herbs, along with rolls of prepared, quick-lighting charcoal can be purchased at book and gift stores. Use a fireproof container. There are holders specifically made for burning incense, or you can use ceramic or glass bowls. Abalone shells are a natural product often used for this purpose. Place a layer of sand, soil, or salt in the bottom of the holder for insulation before adding charcoal and herbs.

In addition to sage, cedar, and sweet grass for cleansing, there are many varieties of prepared incense created from specific herbs chosen for their attributes to work with particular energies. They can help induce light trance states, open psychic centers, aid in relaxation, or stimulate the senses. These incenses can also be purchased at many book and gift stores, and are usually labeled with the ingredients and general guidance about how they can be used.

Choose your incense or smudge with thought and care, and when using them, remember that the way you use them, your intent, will help set the tone of your entire ritual. **(CAUTION: Do not burn smudge around pregnant women, infants, or people with asthma, allergies, or respiratory problems.)**

CREATING SACRED SPACE

The term Sacred Space or Ritual Space are sometimes used interchangeably. They can refer to a literal place where you are doing a ritual. At other times they are used to refer to an experience you are creating.

The space where you do your ritual work is very important. Any ordinary kitchen or living space can be made sacred by preparing and consecrating it. Start by cleaning the space thoroughly. Put away anything not needed for your ritual. After cleaning and clearing your ritual area, you may want to decorate it with flowers or items pertinent to the enactment you are about to undertake. You can also purify the space by smudging it. The goal is to transform the ordinary into a special space in which to enact your ritual.

CANDLES

Candles are often used in ritual and are a time-honored way of connecting to the unseen. Candle lighting can also mark time. When you light a candle with conscious awareness, you create a moment, a beginning or an ending. Burning a candle can also set a mood or create a specific environment. It elevates the ordinary into the non-ordinary of infinite possibilities. It gives focus to any act.

Candle lighting can also intensify our will and determination. It can signify a moment as a personal dedication or commitment. Lighting a candle before you begin your prayers is like picking up a phone and dialing before you speak: it strengthens the connection. Lighting a candle is a signal to our conscious and unconscious mind that something of importance is about to happen or that something significant has just occurred.

SOUND

An important element of ritual, sound can be used to express emotions, move energy, spark physical movement, and set a mood. Many of the rituals in this book include sounds such as beating a drum, speaking words out loud, playing recorded music, or expressing deep emotions like sorrow or rage. In addition to the sound suggested in a ritual, you might want to add your own at other times, as prompted by your intuitions. You might hum, vocalize your feelings, sing, chant, add recorded music, or use instruments such as drums, bells, or rattles. Let go of all self-consciousness in the ritual and give yourself permission to express yourself with sound in any way you feel comfortable.

Using sound and making noise will give further depth and intensity to the ritual. However you use sound, it will best serve the purpose of the ritual when it is woven with your intention.

MOVEMENT

Movement in ritual is very often used with sound and is important because it adds a physical dimension to your enactment. Again, let go of self-consciousness and give your body permission to express itself. How you physically act and interact with symbols, each gesture, how you stand and move—all are significant. You can also dance, clap your hands, stamp your feet, shake like a volcanic eruption, move like the wind or a snake shedding its skin. But, every movement should have specific significance. When each movement is endowed with emotion and supported by intention, your ritual will take on deeper meaning.

CASTING A CIRCLE

The actual words to cast a circle vary, but all present should breathe deeply, and try to quiet their minds from everyday chit-chat. The idea is to verbally commit to making the space sacred, and realize our intention of going between the worlds. A single person might cast whole or part of the circle or different people might take a separate direction each. There is no single way to do any ritual.

To cast the circle, we honor and draw in the energy of the four directions and lastly that energy from within ourselves. (Some groups, such as Native American Indians add the directions of Above and Below). It is usual to cast the circle deosil (moving to the right--clockwise) and to open it by reversing (widdershins-- counter-clockwise).

Various energies called upon might be the Guardians of the four quarters and elements, called Lords of the Watchtowers, or the Mighty Ones are invited to join the Circle. Various Goddesses will be invited into each quarter. Each of the four points of the compass is usually associated with particular Goddesses, elements, cycle of the year, and energy. All – Deities, Elements, Elementals, Energies, Power Animals – that are invoked, are asked to participate in the Ritual, to be present and to support the personal work we are undertaking.

The casting of a circle is an imaginary space drawn around the place we are standing. It is the circle in which we are doing our magic work. We are creating a sacred space. In each direction, a Priestess or Priest will address, or call in the Spirits and Deities associated with that direction. We ask that once a Circle has been cast, Ritualists who feel they must leave (or exit) should "cut" themselves into (or out of) the Circle by carefully opening a space to pass through and closing it after they have crossed the boundary. This can be done by miming cutting out a door shape, passing through a "door" as in a tent, or parting curtains. This prevents a "tear" in the circle boundary which would disrupt the focus and dissipate the energy of the Circle and is, at least, respectful.

RITUAL GUIDELINES

Each ritual at The Temple of the Goddess will vary according to the Sabbat or the Goddess being honored. While each ritual is different there is a basic structure that each ritual will follow. Ritual is never formulaic, but from the heart, freeform and beautiful as the wind on a summer day. There are, however, standard practices that give beauty and substance to rituals.

With Pagans, people practicing Wicca or Natural Religions, *casting a circle* is the first thing to do before starting any Ritual. It provides a purified, protected, and sacred space for rites. It creates a boundary to hold in the collective, generated power, while holding any negative energy outside, and acts as a doorway between the worlds (that space where we commune with Goddesses and Gods). Since it is a collaboration entered into by all participants, it is best that no one leave the circle after it is formed. The circle represents wholeness, perfection, eternity, creation, the womb of Mother Goddess, and the cycle of seasons as well as birth-death-re-generation. By physically making a space for our bodies in this world, we allow our minds to create a space where we are able to safely delve deeper and higher into our multi-levels of consciousness.

A ritual usually takes place in three parts: **Opening**, **Enactment** and **Closing**. In addition to those three, the **Preparation** for each ritual is vitally important.

PREPARATION

- ☞ If a particular ritual or Goddess archetype attracts you then read as much as much information as you can about that Sabbat or archetype. Thoroughly familiarize yourself with the ritual. Work with the symbols of the ritual or deity in dreams or meditations. Keep a journal detailing your thoughts, discoveries, emotions, and experiences.
- ☞ Consult and confer with your support system -- friends, therapist, family, inner guides -- about your process of growth and evolution as related to the ritual you would like to attend.

- ☞ Shop prior to the ritual, with sacred intent, for any ritual items you need or want, such as candles, incense, clothing, or other symbols that will connect you more deeply with the ritual.
- ☞ Declare your intention. In one or two sentences write your intention for the ritual and what you would like to accomplish by participating in this ritual.
- ☞ On the day of the ritual we suggest you prepare yourself by taking a ritual bath to cleanse away daily cares and separate yourself from the world of the mundane. Also use this time to prepare yourself for the upcoming ritual. Think about the intention you set for the ritual. Use this time and space to begin your inner preparation.
- ☞ Honor yourself by reverently dressing for worship. Take time to lovingly dress in ritual clothing, adding jewelry or scarves as you have planned.
- ☞ As you prepare for the ritual, call to mind all the thoughts and ideas that have come to you to support your process of change. While bathing and dressing think of whatever memories or emotional textures you might be working with in your enactment. Call upon divine guidance you will use to support your work, or with inner reverence, dedicate your ritual to serve the higher good of all.
- ☞ Plan your time carefully so that you are not rushed with your preparations. Also, give yourself plenty of time so that you are not rushed getting to the ritual. Allow time for packing ritual items, traffic and parking.

When you arrive at the Temple of the Goddess location you will be met by someone who will check you in at the door. After the check-in you will enter the Temple space. We ask that you enter with reverence, in a state of worship, and with your intention set clearly in your heart and mind. You will be met by a Priestess or Priest who will smudge you (See section on Smudging and Grounding) and direct you where to put your belongings and any altar items such as a candle that needs to be set in place for the enactment of the ritual. There will be Priestesses and Priests available for you to approach if you have any questions before the ritual begins.

OPENING

A Priestess or Facilitator will call the gathering into a circle. The Facilitator will go over the mundane details of parking, bathrooms, time limitations, ritual etiquette, such as not touching altar items that are not yours, not leaving the Sacred Space once the Circle has been cast, and not touching other participants musical instruments. The Facilitator will point out an area or a basket with instruments that are available for anyone to use during the ritual. She will explain and outline the Ritual, the sequence of events to follow. She will prepare you for what is to take place.

While still standing in a circle the Ritual will begin with a . . . simple grounding with sound, usually an Ohm . . . The Circle chants an Ohm until it builds into a synchronistic unity. This humming, "Ohm," is both a cleansing and a centering. Its purpose is to open ourselves spiritually and mentally, to cleanse ourselves of all thoughts and feelings that will impede our full participation in the ritual. We chant together, meditate, to ground ourselves into the present moment, into the Earth, knowing that we are all connected in trusting Unity and that wherever our Spirits travel, our bodies are safely rooted in the floor beneath our feet. When the Circle vibrates with the Oneness of our Ohm, our chant, a Priestess will step out to open the Circle by . . .

Lighting a candle on the central altar.

IN THE EAST:

In a clockwise direction around the circle, a Priestess steps into the circle with the ritual tool of the East, the athame (knife) or sword. Another choice might be a feather or wings of a bird. The color usually associated with this direction is white. The Priestess faces the East and with arms raised calls an invocation, saying something like:

We call You, blessed Isis, whose wings part the Clouds, you who rule the elements of the East, awakening the power of air. East, the place of the rising sun, the place of birth, beginnings, illumination, mysticism, and the eternal, the place of spring. We invite you Elementals of air, whose energy gives power to our breath, to our song and the spoken word. We ask you -- crow, owl, eagle, hummingbird -- all winged ones, to come be here, lend us your knowledge of flight, teach us to soar above the landscape of our lives with courage and ease. Be here now! Blessed Be!

IN THE SOUTH:

A Priestess then steps into the circle with the ritual tool of the South, a magic wand. Another choice might be a snake skin that represents regeneration and the fires of the inner serpent, the Kundalini. The color usually associated with this direction is red. The Priestess faces the South and with arms raised calls an invocation, saying something like:

Sekhmet from the heated sands of Ancient Egypt, Pele from the volcanic depths of Hawaii, Sachamamma, Serpent Mother of South America, we invite you into our circle. Teach us the power of regeneration, the cycles of growth and shedding. We call you, Elementals of fire, Guardians of the Watch Towers of the South, place of heat, solar energy, the place of channeling energy and psychic forces. Come, awaken our passions and our creativity. South, the time of sum-

mer at its fullest, its hottest, its most productive. We call on the energies of all those animals who live in or near heat, such as lions, snakes and the lizards who dream, come aid us in our magical working tonight. We call on all the Spirits of the South, Be here now! Blessed Be!

IN THE WEST:

A Priestess then steps into the circle with the ritual tool of the West, the Chalice, symbol of female creative power and fecundity. Another choice might be a small bowl of water. The color usually associated with this direction is blue. The Priestess faces the West and with arms raised calls an invocation, saying something like:

We call you Aphrodite, Venus, Queen of the Oceans, and Mari of the Sea, you who live in the West and rule the element of water. Yemaya, African Mother who created all from Her living birth waters, we ask you into our circle. Come, teach us to ride the waves our our deepest emotions, realizing the constant flux of all things. The West, the season of Fall, the time when the sun's heat and strength are beginning to wane. We invite the energies of the animals of the west, the water, to aid us in our magical work: whale, porpoise, sea anemones, otter, shark, salmon and eel. We call on the Elementals of Water, the Guardians and Gate Keepers of the West, help us to wisely honor change and the movements in all areas of our lives. Give us the courage to face our deepest feelings and fears. Be here now! Blessed be!

IN THE NORTH:

A Priestess then steps into the circle with the ritual tool of the North, a pentacle, a five pointed star with a single point upright. Another choice might be a drum, a stone, a bowl of dirt or a bone. The color usually associated with this direction is black or gold. The Priestess faces the North and with arms raised calls an invocation, saying something like:

We call upon you great Earth Mother, Gaia, in all your many names to be here in our circle. North, place of the ancestors, of wisdom, of all ancient beings, all those that have gone before. We honor you, the Stone People, who have existed since the beginning, share your slow, ancient knowingness with us. North, the place of caves, mystery, bones and the unknown, of death. The north, when the sun's energy is at its lowest, the time of Winter, of going within, of contemplating the past and looking towards a new day, a new beginning. We invite the energies of all the animal powers of the North, such as elk, deer, wolf, and bear, and those who live in or under the earth, come be present in our magical working. We invite you Elementals of Earth, who have the power of manifesting, teach us the secrets of creation, teach us of the mysteries of manifestation so that we can create our lives in the image of all that is divine. Be here now! Blessed be!

IN THE CENTER:

A Priestess then steps into the center of the circle with arms raised, encompassing all the directions, east, south, west, north and center which represents above, below and inner. She then calls an invocation to Divine Spirit, saying something like:

We call upon you Great Goddess, She of Ten Thousand Names, come, come into our magical circle. Aid us in our work. Protect us with your great loving arms as we open our hearts, our minds, our spirits and seek those deep places within that are wounded. We call you to come and witness our magical working. We ask for healing, for wholeness. Blessed Mother of all! Be here now! Blessed be!

[The Priestess who invokes Spirit will call to specific deities with certain qualities and powers, depending on the purpose of the ritual. She will allude to the particular time of year or Sabbat or to the reason for casting the circle. Each person should silently call in any personal energy they desire at that time.]

SEALING THE CAST CIRCLE:

The Priestess calling in the Center then walks around the gathered circle of participants saying:

THE CIRCLE IS CAST
WE ARE BETWEEN THE WORLDS
BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF TIME AND SPACE
WHERE DAY AND NIGHT
LIFE AND DEATH
JOY AND SORROW
MEET AS ONE
THE FIRE IS LIT AND THE RITUAL HAS BEGUN

ENACTMENT

The planned Ritual is now enacted. This is the focus of the magical working. Each ritual is different and the facilitators will lovingly guide you through each phase. The enactment has been planned around a particular Sabbat, to honor a particular Goddess or to celebrate an important Rite of Passage. Remember, the seasons of nature reflect the inner seasons of the human landscape as well and this is where we explore consciousness, heal the woundings of the past and set goals for ourselves to move us forward on the path of enlightenment and fulfillment.

Elements of the ritual might include a guided journey, ecstatic dancing, meditation, release of something or calling in our heart's desires. This is when your earlier inner preparation can aid you. Call to mind all the thoughts and ideas that have come to you to support your process of change. Call up whatever memories or emotional textures you want to work with in your enactment. Call upon divine guidance to support your work, and with inner reverence, dedicate your ritual to serve the higher good of all. Remember the intention you set earlier. State your intention to yourself and out loud, if appropriate to the group, and repeat it whenever necessary during the enactment of the ritual.

Often the enactment ends by sending a Cone of Power to the earth or to someone who needs healing or to call for peace in the world. This is a sending of group energy, like a prayer. At its conclusion, the circle is opened.

CLOSING

The closing of the ritual consists of devoking or opening the magical circle we have cast. Since the circle was cast deosil, it should be opened in the reverse order (widdershins) or counter-clockwise. The same Priestesses who invoked each direction will now devoke or dismiss the spirits of that direction ending with, "Go if you must, stay if you will. Hail and farewell! Blessed Be!"

This is how we dissolve the energetic circle we created. We thank all the Deities and the Spirits of the elementals and directions and animal energies.

Lastly, the Priestess in the center says:

THE CIRCLE IS OPEN
BUT UNBROKEN

Usually all participants join in unison with this ancient and traditional friendly parting and a promise to meet again:

MERRY MEET
MERRY PART
AND MERRY MEET AGAIN!

Usually, but not always, it is customary to have a feast after opening the circle. You will know from the notices sent out about the ritual if there is to be a feast and what to bring. If there is a feast it is common for each person to bring a dish to share. It is up to the individuals at the circle whether they wish to have a vegetarian feast or whether meat dishes are acceptable. This sharing of food is an ancient rite of bonding. It replenishes the body's energy while replenishing the soul and mind with pleasant conversation.

NOTE: After the ritual, when alone, I suggest you write down any follow-up steps you may be required to take in order to finalize, or set into motion, the changes that you have begun with this ritual. In the days to come you will most likely be challenged in many areas of your life as you seek to integrate and actualize the changes you have initiated. You might daily reaffirm your personal commitment to whatever changes will be required of you. This is the final fulfillment of the intention you declared earlier. In addition to having this commitment witnessed by your spiritual support system, you will want to vocalize this to your physical support system, as well. As you continue the process of integration and actualization in the following days and weeks, continue your dream work, meditation, writing in your journal and talking with your support system.

THE MAGIC OF RITUAL

Author Dion Fortune says, "Magic is the art of causing changes in consciousness according to the will." The Goddess is the container and ritual is the recipe for the magic we create. But it is you -- your will, determination, and commitment that will make the magic happen.

The secret ingredient of magic is love. I challenge you . . . love yourself enough to imagine the life you want . . . love yourself enough to bring all your will and determination into focus and commit yourself to the life you want . . . most of all, love yourself enough to create the life you want. You can do it. You are the secret ingredient. **You are the magic.**

Sabbats

The Holy Days
of
The Wheel of the Year

The Wheel of the Year comprises the seasons of the year: spring, summer, autumn and winter and signify birth, growth, fading and death. These seasons of nature reflect the inner seasons of the human landscape as well. The Wheel consists of eight Sabbats, or holy days. These eight themes represent both the inner and the outer cycles of the seasonal, the celestial, the communal, the creative, and the personal.

IMBOLC OR CANDLEMAS (FEBRUARY 1)

Candlemas is the feast of returning light, a festival of purification and dedication. It is the day on which winter turns upward to the spring. Winter and death are cleansed away, and as the days lengthen, hope grows for the warmth of new life. Candlemas is nurtured beginnings, a sweeping away of the past and an affirmation of things to come.

SPRING EQUINOX (MARCH 22)

Spring is the time of bursting forth, of realizing the potentials of Winter Solstice and Candlemas. On the equinoxes light and dark are equal in a moment's balance. The Spring Equinox is the time of conception, when the rising light is ascending and overcomes darkness.

BELTANE (MAY 1)

Beltane is the celebration and honoring of the Earth at Her most fertile time as She receives the seeds that will grow into the fall harvest. It signifies mystical union and harmony with the environment. The traditional Beltane fire symbolized the central hearth of the community and represented the mystic divine fire at the center of all things, whose spark of life is carried by each of us.

SUMMER SOLSTICE (JUNE 21)

Summer Solstice is the shortest night of the year, Midsummer's Night. This is the time of fertility realized. Here the circle wanes toward darkness and winter's mystery, though winter is still far away.

LAMMAS (AUGUST 1)

Lammas is the Sabbat of first fruits and green corn, the ending of summer. Lammas is a time of completions. It is the fertile, prosperous harvest that assures life's survival is nearly ready but not yet certain. It is still vulnerable to change.

FALL EQUINOX (SEPTEMBER 23)

Fall is the time of Thanksgiving, a time of gifts and blessings worldwide. Day and night are equal and the balance of giving and taking, of light and dark, summer and winter, life and death are the focus of this Sabbat. Though the year is waning and winter approaches, the emphasis is less on death than on the message of rebirth in the harvest seeds and the plenty of the season.

HALLOWEVE (OCTOBER 31)

This is the new year, the time when the veil between this world and the spirit world is at its thinnest. It marks the onset of a darker, more introspective time of year. The theme of Halloween Eve is honoring darkness, memory of the dead, communication with the spirit world, and purification for the future.

WINTER SOLSTICE (DECEMBER 21)

Winter Solstice, or Yule, is the night of longest dark, the point of deepest night and winter before the returning of new life. . .the rebirth of the sun. This time of year signifies enlightenment, when the light is reborn within the womb of darkness.

IMBOLC

Imbolc (pronounced "im bolg" or "im bolk") literally means "ewe's milk". It's a time in early spring (February 02) when pregnant ewes begin to produce more milk in preparation for their giving birth later in the spring. It is the time of increasing light, and a promise of warmer days. Early buds are forming on trees and underground bulbs shiver and push toward the air and light. This is a time of initiation, of beginnings, and a renewal of vows. This Sabbat celebrates the growing life in the womb of Mother Earth.

We have gone inward during the colder winter days and nights and probed our thoughts and deeds. It is time to bring the unfulfilled promises forward along with completed promises and accomplishments. Bring them all out into the strengthening light. You will also find that the dark, heavy uncompleted vows and acts are not so dark and heavy in the light of the renewing sun.

The light this time of year is very soft and gentle. It will be kind to your transgressions, failures, or omissions. The spring light will caress your successes, joys, and love.

As the Earth Mother prepares for the birth of Her son, the Sun God, we should examine our own pregnancy. What are we about to birth into our lives, into society? Have we thought it out sufficiently so this will be the proper time and place for this particular birth? Have we cared for the baby, in utero, well enough that it will be born healthy?

SPRING EQUINOX

Spring Equinox (Vernal Equinox) is a solar festival, celebrating balance. Daylight hours equal nighttime hours. We rejoice in the equal balance of principles of male and female, both in society and in each one of us. After March 20th, daylight increases, nighttime decreases.

Traditionally, Spring Equinox is not the first day of spring, but the midpoint of the season which stretches between Imbolc (Feb 01) and Beltane (May 01). It marks the birth of the infant Sun God, and promises us a green summer. Dionysian rites were enjoyed this time of year.

Some books state that the Goddess Bridget felt the first quickening in Her womb at Imbolc, others say She was married then and conceives the sky God's child now, which will be born in midwinter. Whichever is incorporated into your mythology, last month and this month is the time of gathering seeds for planting, preparing the soil, and thinking ahead to the future birth of ideas. It is the time of fertilizing, of nurturing, and bringing together those items which will facilitate the birth.

The Asatru festival of Summer Finding is sacred to the Norse God Thor (included among His many titles: God of farm work). The Norse God/Goddess couple of Freyr and Freya are also honored at this time.

Throughout the world, throughout time, eggs have been associated with this time of the year. Blood-red dyed eggs have been given to newborns and corpses alike. They have been, and still are, symbols of birth and rebirth. Farmers have dyed and rolled them on the fields to make the ground fertile. Essentially all cultures have viewed the egg as a symbol of eternity, fecundity, and the power of Woman. We have, all of us, come from an egg.

"Mother Earth lies in the world's midst rounded like an egg
and all Blessings are there inside her as in a honeycomb."

Petronius (1st Century C.E. Roman)

BELTANE

Beltane, also known as MayDay, is one day of a sequence of six festival days called "Floralia" celebrated since 173 BCE. It is possible the name "Beltane" derives from the first two deities of the Carthaginian Triad, Baal-Hammon, Tanit, and Eshmun. Irish for fire is teine and has been considered a gift of Tanit. Bel-ti-na, the first day of May was considered the beginning of summer and derived its name from the Roman Goddess Maia. It has long been customary to extinguish all fires in the village and to relight them from the Beltane fire made from nine types of wood. All present at the Beltane fire ceremony jumped through the smoke and flames to purify themselves and to promote fertility (creativity).

Day 01: 28 April is dedicated to Flora, a Sabine Goddess of the spring, and the flower of youth and its pleasures. For Her feast, men put flowers in their hair, on their clothes, and animals. Women wore colorful dresses and gave themselves up to unrestrained joy. For the first five days of the festival they had theatrical performances, mainly lewd farces called mimes.

Day 02: The philosopher Cicero once said that among the duties of his office was one where he propitiated Mother Flora by the holding of games.

Day 03: Beltane Eve. In Europe children gathered spring flowers and hung May baskets. Celtic bonfires (bonfires) were lit and the cattle were blessed. The Spanish set this day aside for the cult of the dead. They also lit bonfires, but at tombs to honor the dead. The Germans call this day Walpurgis Night when witches hold revelry at certain high places, a favorite spot being the Brocken of Germany. Eighteenth Century map makers have marked the Brocken as the highest peak of the Hartz Mountains, stating it was "Witches' Ground" where Sabbats took place. The peak has an altar and a spring used for Ritual for many centuries. St Walpurga was the sister of Saints Willibald and Wunnibald. All three emigrated from England to Germany in the eighth century. She became the Abbess of a convent at Heidenheim in Franconia. Walburg, not coincidentally, is an old Teutonic name for the Earth Mother! She may have been an actual person, or the evolution of the pagan Goddess of Walpurgisnacht. There were double monasteries during this time carrying on the traditional "colleges" of priestesses and priests living together under a female ruler, and apparently continuing the ancient sex rites under a thin veil of Christian-Pagan syncretism.

Day 04: This first day of May is dedicated to Tanit, the Phoenician moon Goddess, claimed to be worshiped in Cornwall with ritual bonfires on old Pagan festival dates. Every territory of the Celtic Kingdom lit two bonfires and solemnly drove their cattle between them in order to protect them from various pestilential diseases for the coming year. The ancient Irish people, those who worshiped the Goddess Danu, claimed that kissing the dew on May First morning was magical. Numerous Assyrian reliefs show a sacred Moon Tree which may be symbolic of the days of the lunar month. Its arch, showing intertwined flower stalks, ropes, or cord looks very much like a Maypole. The Maypole was traditionally cut from oak, birch, elm or fir, trees associated with fertility. Covered with garlands of flowers and ribbons, young men and women (alternating) danced around the pole, weaving in and out, braiding the ribbons around the pole. The Maypole, clearly a male symbol, and the flowers and ribbons, female symbols, together celebrate the season's sexual passion and joy that creates growth. The sacred pole is the symbol of Ishtar, or Astarte. Guinevere advises her knights that on May Day fairies have special power and that when they go a-maying they should wear green, the color of eternal youth, resurrection, and rebirth. In Sussex the Maypole used to be topped with a large birch

broom (female genitals were known vulgarly as 'the broom'). On May Day, the Romans prayed to Bona Dea (the Good Goddess), Maia (one of the Pleiades identified with spring), and to Dea Dia, probably a Goddess of the cornfields.

Day 05: There is nothing specific recorded for this day.

Day 06: In Rome a secret festival was held by Vestal Virgins for Bona Dea for the good of the people. It was held at the house of the officiating consul or praetor of the city on the night of May 3-4. The room decorated with vine branches and other green plants and flowers, matrons and Vestal Virgins danced and played wind and stringed instruments. No men were allowed, even male statues at the ceremony site were covered with veils.

"But far off we heard the laughter of cloistered maids, where a holy grove made a dark encircling wood, the secret place of the Goddess of Women, with holy fountains and rites . . . Wreaths of purple veiled its portals far withdrawn, and a hut shone with sweet fire of incense. A poplar decked the shrine with far-spread leaves, and its deep foliage shielded singing birds."

(Propertius IV ix, 23)

SUMMER SOLSTICE

The sun at Summer Solstice is at its highest, even if hiding behind low lying clouds.

Mother Earth is heavy with Her pregnancy as we are heavy with our own pregnancies (philosophies forming, plans stewing in the backs of our minds, or different elements of a formed plan coming into fruition). As with any gestation, care must be taken that the child will be birthed having the rosy glow of health.

How we think, feel, and feed our gestating babies is of prime importance at this time. Surround yourself with nature's growing abundance, the sounds of birds, insects, and the neighborhood cats and dogs. If you're lucky enough to have a cat or dog living with you, give them a talisman or a healing body rub.

This is the time to dream your psychic dreams in order to be shown the path you must follow at this time of the year. Dream pillows filled with mugwort, lavender or lemongrass can be slipped beneath your pillow slip so the odor will conjure a special dream. As you relax in bed before falling asleep, recite a verse similar to the following:

Mugwort cross the psychic sea. Prophetic dreams now come to me.

Chant it over and over until you fall into the arms of Morpheus. It is a good idea to have a paper and pencil handy for jotting down those elusive, but useful dreams.

May we all have the knowledge needed to understand and then weave those psychic dreams into our everyday existence.

LAMMAS

Lammas is the first of the three harvests traditionally gathered in each agricultural year. This Sabbat traditionally honors Lugh, the Celtic Sun God and His mate, Dana, who often took human form to join the Druids in their rites and celebrations.

At this time of year the Great Goddess comes to us in the form of abundant food, friends, and blessings. Each of us needs to look specifically at what we have received by living at this time and place.

Mother Earth, Gaia, has been freely giving to each of us. Perhaps not exactly what we wanted or when we wanted it. But know that She, as a loving Mother, wants us to be happy. We must admit, though, She has our souls in Her keeping and knows what's best for us.

As we gather our harvest to us, we should also give some of that bounty back to the Goddess. By giving back to Earth some of our riches we complete the cycle. By sacrificing to the Goddess we make that offering sacred by its loss in our lives. It is an exchange of energies. Each offering is a seed that will bloom in the future, and we have no idea what kind of flower the seed will produce. All that is known is that we will receive blessings three times three.

AUTUMN EQUINOX

September 23rd marks the actual day of Autumn Equinox. Day and night are equal. Light and dark are balanced. But only two days out of 365 have equal day and night. Light and dark are constantly fluctuating. Mother Earth's cycle is in constant motion.

If we count the sunlit hours and compare them to the moonlit or moonless hours, then we just might find that overall, Mother Earth's light is balanced. Left to Herself, Mother Earth is very balanced—look how long She's lived. She is only now beginning to feel ill because of human intervention.

What does 'balanced' mean? It doesn't mean that we are happy all the time, or even healthy all the time. It means that we are awake. We are conscious to all that is going on in our lives. We cannot ignore the dark elements that swirl around and through us. Without the dark, we would have no realization of light. We need to be careful, though, that the darkness does not smother our light.

Just as it is peaceful to stare into a candle flame, watching it dance with, respond to, the slightest current of air, we must be willing to stare into the blackness to see what can be birthed from the darkest Void. As sure as there is power in the flame, there is strength in the Void. In every-day life, darkness signals our brains that it is time to rest. It is a time to allow our subconscious to talk to us in dreams.

As we prepare in the Autumn for the coming dark months, remember that it is a time of rest. Going inward, coming face to face with our own dark visage, should not be a fearful thing. A dark lightbulb only needs the flick of a switch to blare forth light and heat. The paradox is that we need strength to face the darkness, yet we can derive strength from that darkness. Face the Void and ask the question, "What do I want?" Probe to discover reasons for your anger, weakness, lack of attention, irritability, lack of love toward those who most need it, lack of health or strength, procrastination . . .

You might find that the anger cascading on a family member, friend, or co-worker is misdirected. Perhaps you are angry at yourself. By going inward and asking the Void, "What do I want?", you will begin to see reasons for the action.

Autumn Equinox is the time for harvesting all the abundance we have gathered during the summer planting season. By knowing how much is stored in the root cellar, we are assured that there will be plenty for the dark, winter season. Know that you will have sufficient stores set back to nourish the most exhausting journey. Know also that every journey has a starting point (the first step) and a destination. The starting point is turning inward and asking the question. The answer will tell you the destination. Actually, the answer is the destination and the beginning of the next journey.

HALLOWS EVE

This is the time of the third and final harvest of the year (called the meat harvest). It is a time of ending (summer, physical activity in the warm sun, relaxation in the form of vacations), but it is also a time of beginning (shifting from physical action to internalizing, conserving strength, and reassessment of our lives). Perhaps this is why the Celts called Samhain (Hallows Eve) their New Year.

When the veil is thin we can ask support and/or guidance from ancestors and loved ones who now walk with the Goddess.

In ancient times a new fire was lit, but where the Beltane fire was lit at dawn, the Hallows Eve fire was kindled at dusk. The purpose of the bonfire was to banish anything hurtful or negative (that which is holding us back from the growth we are capable of at this time) from the past year.

As late as 1938 children went door to door asking for "Soul Cakes", and at midnight when souls of the dead visit their earthly homes, families would make sure to have a lighted candle in each room to guide them and place a glass of wine on the table for them to refresh themselves.

Everything has a shadow side, and Hallows Eve and the Winter Solstice make up the shadow side of the year. Without shadow, light would be incomprehensible.

Cambodians call their dead to supper, "Oh, you who are our ancestors, who are departed, deign to come and eat!" Ritual food is placed on tables in Persia, West Africa, Sicily, Italy, and present-day Mexicans have a picnic in the cemetery, delicacies laid out for the living and the dead alike. Until recently, "ghost" and "guest" were pronounced the same, and both are derived from the Germanic root, "geist".

Hallows Eve came to America when the potato famine in 1846 forced a million Irish immigrants to sail to our shores. It wasn't until the Eleventh Century that Christians claimed it for their own, emphasizing All Souls Day, and All Saints Day.

The symbols used in North America--ghost figures, masks, fires, and food--are the same as those used thousands of years ago in ancient Egypt for the Isia.

The Isia was a six day festival to commemorate the death of the corn God, Osiris, but it was named after his consort, Isis. Participants masqueraded as Goddesses and Gods reenacting the saga of Osiris' death, disappearance, and rebirth. Although he dies in the fall, just as the corn is scythed, he is reborn as the springtime corn and is finally consumed as bread, living again in those humans who consume his sacred loaves. The Isia honored all departed souls. The Egyptians' Isia traveled to Greece and Rome, and was most likely the beginning seed of the Celtic Samhain.

One should perform rituals for strength and commitment in order to achieve goals set for the coming year. If the veil is thin between the living and the dead, then most assuredly, the veil is thin between all worlds. Think about how your life touches and interacts with various worlds, not just the physical and emotional worlds of our friends and associates, but the worlds of daydream, nightdream, meditation, trance, guided journeys, and individual spirit journeys where you might travel to the Upper or Lower World. Acknowledge the existence of All Worlds.

Hallows Eve is a time to seek personal clarity, and also the time to think about how to heal Mother Earth for Herself and all her children.

Reflect on your loved ones who have passed on and now know the Mysteries of the Universe, reflect on that which is negative that must be banished, but also look ahead knowing the springtime will come, and those seeds lying dormant in the cooling earth will surely sprout into green, healthy plants to sustain us through summer.

WINTER SOLSTICE

The day of Winter Solstice is the shortest and night the longest of the entire year. Solstice, Latin, means "the sun stands still". At the Solstice, the sun rises and sets at the same time for several days. So the sun has ceased shortening daylight hours, but hasn't yet begun to increase them. It's on a pivot point, an in between phase of not gaining ground, but not losing any either. All of us have felt that way, sometimes too frequently. We usually berate ourselves for not growing, not moving forward, but we should acknowledge and praise ourselves at that time for not falling back into old habits, for not going into the negative side of the equation. It's all right, sometimes, to pause at the crossroads and reflect on the path trodden, before choosing a path before us.

In agricultural societies it is, and always was, the custom to stay indoors during the short, dark days of winter. Except for the year-round chores such as feeding the livestock, maintenance and repair work was done inside. Women sewed quilts, darned socks, and kept the hearth fire burning. Men sharpened knives, repaired engines or leather harnesses for the plow animals. It was a time of quietly sitting by the warming fire and thinking about the past year.

Neolithic and Paleolithic peoples were forced to stay in their mud huts or caves, crowding around the fire to sustain their body heat, their lives. They only went into the darkened days when absolutely needed. Necessities such as fresh meat must be gotten regularly. Early on they found they could put aside grains to last the lean season.

Although we are not dependent on staying by the fire on cold winter days, it is still a season for contemplation. This is a time when everything around us has died back. Golden, red, or amber leaves fall from tall trees leaving the branches dark, sharp edges etched against a gray-blue sky. In most of North America flowers and food crops are dead, their left-over stalks and roots covered with snow or pushed into the soggy ground by winter rains.

Days grow progressively shorter.

Death surrounds us.

If we are to continue to be emotionally, psychically strong, it is imperative to go periodically within and assess our lives. Contemplation makes us more conscious of our inner workings, thereby making us more conscious of our outer lives. A common quote from Shakespeare says, "This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man." (Hamlet: Act 1, scene 3)

Prepare to go inward on December 20th, the day before the last day of winter. As we go into the darkest recesses of our psyches, know that the seeds dropped in Autumn and lying dormant in the cold clutches of Mother Earth are waiting for the longer days of Spring when they will split their protective husks, push through the packed soil and color the Earth with their greenness.

This is the time of the year when the reigning King dies and Goddess Mother of us all gives birth to the new King. In modern times Goddess Mari gave birth to Jesus, and in ancient times, the Sky-Goddess Hathor gave birth to the sun Ra, in the form of the sacred Scarab Beetle.

In our culture, the sun is classified as male, but has retained its ancient feminine gender in northern Europe and Arab nations as well as Japan where She is Amaterasu Omikami, the Heaven-Illumination Goddess.

"Amaterasu withdrew into a cave to hide from the irritating antics of her bothersome brother, Susu-wo-no, the storm god. Her action plunged the world into darkness and the people panicked. They begged, beseeched, implored the sun goddess to come back, but to no avail. At last, on the Winter Solstice, Alarming Woman, a sacred clown, succeeded in charming, teasing, and finally yanking her out, as if from an earthly birth canal, and reinstating her on her rightful celestial throne." (Celestially Auspicious Occasions by Danna Henes)

At this time of year death and rebirth coincide. If we look, we can see how the two are intertwined. Rebirth comes from death as surely as death comes from life. The old King, old vegetation, old habits, must die in order to create space for the New. The young must, in order to survive, consume the older generation, because that's where the energy is. So let new, healthier habits feed off our older, destructive habits. Let young thoughts consume those cobwebby thoughts that don't serve us anymore. Bury negative energy that holds us back from doing the best we are capable of. Let Mother Earth use that negative energy by turning it into fertilizer to enrich the land for our newly-born, positive energy which will drive us forward into territory that will be awesome to behold.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

GODDESS HERSTORY

Amber, The Golden Gem of the Ages

Rice, Patty

Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings; Vol II, The New Kingdom

Lichtheim, Miriam

Ancient Egyptian Myths and Legends

Spence, Lewis

Ancient Goddesses

Goodison, Lucy & Morris, Christine (eds)

Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood: A Treasury of Goddess and Heroine Lore from Around the World

Stone, Merlin

Athene: Virgin and Mother in Greek Religion

Kerenyi, Karl; Translated by Stein, Murray

"Aunt Jennifer's Tigers': Notes Towards a Preliterary History of Women's Archetypes"

Pratt, Annis in *Feminist Studies* 4, February 1978

Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion, & Politics in Italy

Birnbaum, Lucia Chiavola

Body of the Goddess, The: Sacred Wisdom in Myth, Landscape and Culture

Pollack, Rachel

Book of Lilith, The

Koltuv, Barbara Black

Book of Lilith, The

Koluvch, Linda

Catal Huyuk: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia

Mellaart, James

Catal Huyuk in Perspective

Todd, Jan A.

Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers

Green, Miranda

Celtic Mythology

Bellingham, David

Chalice and the Blade, The

Eisler, Riane

Civilization of the Goddess, The

Gimbutas, Marija

- Corpus of Religious Material from the Civilian Areas of Roman Britain, A*
Green, Miranda
- Crone, The*
Walker, Barbara
- Cult of the Mother-Goddess, The*
James, E.O.
- Dark Mother: African Origins and Godmothers*
Birnbaum, Lucia Chiavola
- Dearest Goddess*
Benjamins, Eso
- Discovering Kwan Yin, Buddhist Goddess of Compassion*
Boucher, Sandy
- Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God Throughout the World, The*
Harvey, Andrew & Baring, Anne (compilers)
- Earth Mother, The: Legends, Ritual Arts, & Goddesses of India*
Jayakar, Pupul
- Eve: The History of an Idea*
Phillips, John A.
- Eye Goddess, The*
Crawford, O.G.S.
- Feminist Companion to Mythology, The*
Larrington, Carolyne (ed)
- Five Sacred Festivals of Ancient Japan, The*
Casal, U.A.
- Folk Tale, Fiction and Saga in the Homeric Epics*
Carpenter, Rhys
- From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas*
Marler, Joan (ed)
- Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History*
Dan, Joseph
- Goddess: A Celebration in Art and Literature*
Bonheim, Jalaja
- Goddess, The*
Husain, Shahrukh
- Goddess Book of Days, The*
Stein, Diane
- Goddess from Anatolia, The*
Mellaart, James

- Goddess: Mother of Living Nature*
Getty, Adele
- Goddess Obscured, The*
Berger, Pamela
- Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*
Castilla, Ana
- Goddess of the Stones, The: The Language of the Megaliths*
Meaden, George Terence
- Goddess Within, The*
Wooleer, Jennifer & Roger
- Goddesses*
Graham, Lanier
- Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, The: 6,500 - 3,500 BC, Myths and Cult Images*
Gimbutas, Marija
- Goddesses in World Mythology*
Ann, Martha & Imel, Dorothy Myers
- Goddesses' Mirror, The: Visions of the Divine from East and West*
Kinsley, David
- Goddesses—Myths of the Female Divine*
Leeming, David & Page, Jake
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World of the First Australians, The
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Mists of Avalon, The

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Wit'ch Fire
Wit'ch Storm
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PRIESTESSES OF TEMPLE OF THE GODDESS

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