The Divine Feminine in Mythology and Theology

There are a lot of goddesses in mythology. And mythology is a part of so many traditions: Greek, Roman, Celtic, Egyptian, Nordic, Hindu and Pagan. These goddesses, as I’ll share with you, portray feminine energy in many ways, beyond maternal love. We ladies are not just one trick ponies.

But I had an insight when I accidently looked up the goddess Diana in the Metaphysical Bible Dictionary—which I used for the theology of the divine feminine. In Acts 19 there is a scuffle in Ephesus between Paul and his disciples and a silversmith named Demetrius. Now the temple in Ephesus was devoted to the Roman goddess Diana, also called Artemis in Greek mythology. She was the goddess of the hunt, of virginity and of birth. Paul has said, “No god made with hands can be a god.” Demetrius was furious that Paul and his One God might ruin the business of the silversmiths creating Goddess figures and alters out of silver. Eventually the hub-bub subsided without a riot. But it made me consider something: the divine feminine in mythology—all the gods and goddesses in mythology—focus on the material world and how to control it through these gods and goddesses. The divine feminine in theology is a part of our spiritual nature. It is a part of divine principle which operates beyond the material world in unchanging ways whether we believe or not. Now we are both human and divine so we can explore both as a part of how we live a spiritual life on this material plane.

Perhaps the closest to our theology is the Hindu tradition of Brahma, the creator, self-born god and then couples that represent the male and female energy: Shiva and Shakti, Rama and Sita, Lakshmi and Vishnu. Two holidays in the Hindu tradition celebrate goddesses. Navrati is celebrated over nine nights and seven days and represents the different aspects of Durga, the demon fighting goddess. She is usually seated on a lion and her name means “alleviating suffering”. Diwali is the festival of lights celebrating Lakshmi, the goddess of abundance of spiritual and material wealth.

The Celts were a warrior culture who gained land, cattle and material goods through waging battle. So many of their goddesses reflect a warrior quality. Morrigan is a terrifying crow goddess associated with war and death. But their goddesses, who have been revived in the current pagan traditions also included Cerridwen, keeper of the cauldron, goddess of the moon, magic, agriculture, poetry, music, art and science. Her name means “chiding love.” And there is Mabb, who acts as a midwife to the fairies.
We may be most familiar with the Greek goddesses, many of whom are duplicates, with new names, from the Roman goddesses. Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. Athena is the goddess of war, wisdom and domestic crafts. Gaia is the earth mother goddess and Iris is the goddess of rainbows and servant to the gods.

So in all these goddesses we find aspects of ourselves and our earthly life. War and birth, fertility, love, beauty, nature, creation and destruction. All aspects we find in ourselves, male and female. What troubled Paul and the early church who pursued Christianity in the face of all the god and goddess worship was that the Greek and Roman celebrations and rituals often were earthly based and became carnal, sense driven events of excess. The very things that caused Jesus to overturn the tables of the money changers, selling animals and birds for sacrifice in the Jewish temples. Although those sacrifices weren’t about human sensation, they were not about spiritual growth either. And this is the tension we face; to know and accept our humanity and our spirituality without judgment and without excess perhaps.

So we come to the divine feminine in Theology.

One of the early prophets was Deborah. The MBD says her name means “bee”. Bees are noted for their fine sense of discrimination and for their great activity. Deborah symbolizes a very active, sustaining soul quality. She represents judgment based on spiritual discrimination. Sometimes we call that “discernment”. Deborah went into battle to accompany Barak (who represents the executiveness of will). Charles Fillmore writes: “When the inner intuitive judgment and the directive power in understanding are rightly joined, victory over the enemies of the Children of Israel follows. The Children of Israel represent the real, enduring spiritual thoughts and the enemies are the material, transitory thoughts.” “In mixed states of consciousness, where to appearances error is strongest, it is by following the intuitive leadings of Spirit that the way to the light is opened.”

Notice that both the intuitive spiritual discernment and the active direction of will are ours to claim and to call forward. We humans like to divide things. Since the most obvious difference in our humanity is our genitals, we use feminine and masculine to assign qualities to our gender. In modern romance languages, nouns are either masculine or feminine. Doors, windows, tables. Do they seem masculine or feminine to you? This is the system WE have created.
But let’s look at some more spiritual qualities. Sarai was Abraham’s wife. Remember God promised Abraham to give him a son, even though Sarai had been barren and was now an advanced age. Because of her faith, she is transformed into Sarah. As Sarai, her name is Hebrew for bitter and contentious. Fillmore says this represents “The soul is contending for its rightful place in consciousness. The individual is just recognizing the fact that affections and emotions are in essence divine and must not be united with material conditions, but with Spirit.” Since Fillmore links affections with emotions, it implies the emotions he is referring to would be love, desire for some ideal, and perhaps forgiveness and compassion. Since he would have them aligned with Spirit, it would not be our emotions like anger, vengeance, and greed.

Transformed, Sarah is Hebrew for princess, noble woman. Fillmore says, “In spiritual symbolism, woman represents the soul or intuitive phase. Sarah is the spiritual soul.”

Abraham got antsy and impatient with God’s timetable for a son. So he had a son with Sarah’s maid Hagar. This was followed by the plagues upon the house of pharaoh. Not a good outcome.

Sarah stayed faith-filled and patient. Fillmore points out, “No real spiritual demonstration is made unless the divine law is recognized and obeyed. If we try to demonstrate Truth through our personal will and effort, we shall find that we have fallen short.”

If Sarah represents the “spiritual soul” according to Fillmore, Ruth represents the “love of the soul in its natural state, or the love of the natural soul for God and for the things of the Spirit.” Ruth is Hebrew for desirable, friendship and beautiful. The book of Ruth is the only book in the Bible named for a woman. The story of Ruth links a Moabite, a non-Jew, to the lineage of Jesus. Ruth follows her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Naomi’s home in Bethlehem and into her faith. “Your God shall be my God.” There Ruth marries Boaz, which proves advantageous for both Ruth and Naomi. And places Ruth in the lineage to Jesus. Fillmore describes that lineage as “the progression of thought from simple, loving obedience and devotion to mighty ruler of worlds. Thus spiritual thought grows, quietly and slowly but increasingly until it finally carries all before it.”

Notice this is about an obedience and devotion to Spirit, not to man. When we take the Bible literally, we find the misunderstandings that get canonized in
religion. Unity believes all the Bible is a story about our spiritual growth and evolution, not a literal history or guidebook of requirements. All of the characters, male and female, represent parts of ourselves.

So finally Mary, which the MBD says is from Hebrew meaning contradiction; rebellious outcry and bitterness. You might find that surprising and not very motherly. Fillmore says Mary represents, “the feminine, the soul, the affectional and emotional phase of being, both when seemingly bound and limited by sensate thought, and in its freed, exalted state.” He goes on to say about Mary, the mother of Jesus, “This coming of the Christ body into activity is the result of an exalted idea sown in the mind and matured by the soul.” The story is the idea was sown by the angel messenger Gabriel and matured as the gestation unfolded. Fillmore goes on to say, “The soul is devout and expectant. It believes in the so-called miraculous as a possibility.” Why does Fillmore say, “so-called miraculous”? He and Butterworth said that nothing is a miracle if you believe a miracle is outside divine law and principle.

I was a little surprised Fillmore was such a fan of Mary Magdalene. Many religions have degraded Magdalene as woman and discredited her as a disciple of Jesus. But Fillmore says Mary Magdalene represents constancy, gratitude, love, faithful attachment and service. Mary was with Jesus at countless times, including the visit to the empty tomb. Fillmore says, “The soul consciousness in each individual is capable of the strongest, deepest and fullest allegiance to Truth.” Ironically, not the mother figure, that strong, deep allegiance to your child is a hallmark of what we consider a positive mothering characteristic. It may be a teacher, a mentor, a relative but having someone believe in you, no matter what, is powerfully nurturing.

Fillmore also said this, “A service rendered without depth of love and feeling, without the very substance of one’s own being, is only an empty form.” Do we give acts without contributing our love and being? How nurturing is all the cooking and cleaning, bandaging boo-boos, class cupcakes, potty training the stray pups, and listening to our accomplishments and challenges. It doesn’t matter who gave this, this is the affectionate soul giving of its self.

Some of us have mothered for years without children. When I was a teenager, I mothered my brother’s friends. One night, I wedged a very drunk young man against the wall and steered him down the stairs into our downstairs family room couch. With that inebriated haze just before sleep he looked up at me and said, “You’ll make a great mother someday.” It was my calling since the day I got my first pup and put him in my doll bed. I love being a mother!
Many of us are not called to parenting and that does not mean we do not have all the feminine, worldly or spiritual, characteristics we have discussed. All of us also have characteristics we do not focus on and suppress. This is the discounting of the feminine in a patriarchal society for many years.

As we celebrate mothers and the feminine in all of us, connect with that nurturing, creative, intuitive, giving, loving part of ourselves. Bring it out, celebrate it and give thanks for your divine feminine. If your Mom is alive, call her. If your Mom has begun her journey beyond our sight, send her the original wireless call—a prayer. Happy Mother’s Day everyone!