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The ancient goddess

The goddess was pivotal to many early, earth-centered civilizations. She was considered the creative source of all life. Female sexuality was honored, not only for reproduction, but also for the way it inspired passion, desire and pleasure.

Archaeologists have unearthed innumerable ancient goddess images. Some date from Paleolithic times - circa 30,000 BC to 9,000 BC - and often take the form of a woman's body with large breasts, hips, and vulva. They depict the female body as sacred, and the female genitals as symbols of divine mystery, portals through which all pass into this life, symbols of Life's cycles and regeneration.

In such early societies, divinity, sexuality and fertility were intertwined and integrated. The pre-Christian cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome worshipped powerful female divinities as well as male ones. These goddesses were personifications of the archetypal feminine energy that exists within all women. (Archetypes are universal ideas, images and patterns of thought that we share in our unconscious). They are powerful forces deep within us that influence how we view the world and what we do. In our lives today, archetypes are reflected in different aspects of ourselves with which we can identify: lover, wife, mother, daughter, nurturer, organizer, protector, destroyer, and seductress. This list, of course, is not exhaustive.

Let's take a look at a couple of specific examples of these archetypes, one of which is the nurturer and all-giving mother in the Christian tradition, the very familiar Virgin Mary. She has been depicted throughout the ages with the Christ child held adoringly in her arms. In Greek mythology, her equivalent is Demeter, the mother; always putting her children's needs paramount.

We are familiar too with the good wife and homemaker roles that many of our mothers and grandmothers undertook in the 1950s and '60s. The goddesses Hera and Hestia from Greek mythology both symbolize a woman devoted to her husband, family and home, one who uses her creativity to make an orderly and nurturing place for those she loves.

Archetypes in contemporary times

In the late 1960s, '70s and '80s, women began to struggle with the limitations of traditional roles. Many women were already venturing beyond the homemaking role into more public arenas such as the professions of law, medicine, economics and politics where the qualities of a woman being objective, impersonal and skilful reflect the aspects of the goddess Athena.

During the '80s, interest in physical fitness became fashionable. Madonna, the pop singer and actress, popularized sleek, defined muscles and a strong physical body. At this time, many women became interested in aerobics, going to the gym and bodybuilding. The goddess archetype of physical strength is Artemis. Some women can identify with one or two of these goddesses while others are ignored, passed by or suppressed.

You've seen goddesses in parts of your life and in the lives of others; a woman who turns heads whenever she walks into a room, or a friend who always exudes confidence and optimism. Or perhaps a work associate who manages to pull together projects with efficiency and professionalism, or a grandmother who is full of care, warmth and love.

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We sometimes admire or are envious of different qualities in other women. The good news is that each of us has the power to bring the inner goddess of our choice to the forefront, whenever we so desire.

Of course my favourite western goddess for inspiration is Aphrodite- the Ancient *Greek* goddess of love and sexuality. She was one of the original Tantric Goddesses.

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