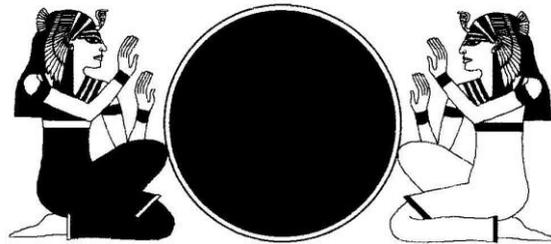


Temple of the Dark Moon



Understanding and Working with Deity

By Frances Billinghamurst ©c.2004

The Divine consciousness, Universal Energy, or whatever term you are comfortable with using, describes a force that is basically beyond our understanding on our current physical plane. In Pagan thought, this energy manifests itself into masculine (the God) and feminine (the Goddess) aspects. Both these aspects are equally important, and form part of the Divine consciousness (the "macrocosm"), as well as our own selves (the "microcosm"). Unlike other more orthodox religious or spiritual paths, one thing that quickly becomes apparent about the differing Pagan traditions is the abundance of Gods and Goddesses, or Deity. But why is this and how does one choose the most appropriate Deity?

What is important to keep in mind when looking at the various traditions within Paganism is that the word itself loosely describes a variety of differing spiritual belief systems (not all religious) with some common elements. These common elements include a reverence of the natural cycles of the Universe, and practices based on pre-Christian belief. Some people follow specific traditions, such as Druidry, Wytchcraft, Wicca, Hermetic Magick, and Shamanism, while others do not. It can therefore be said that Paganism is a belief system offering a large scope of practices, all of which can be extremely individualistic. But back to Deities.

Man's earliest religious or spiritual beliefs would have depended very much on the environment in which he lived. For example, if a tribe resided next to the river, they would have specific Deities associated with that particular body of water. A tribe residing in the shadows of a volcano would have, no doubt, Deities associated with the powerful forces of the volcano. Most pantheons have certain Deities associated with the basic needs and wants of their people - health, fertility, nature and of the hunt, etc. The more patriarchal tribes also had Deities associated with warfare and victory. This is why when we look at the differing mythologies from around the world, we often come across various Deities with similar yet, different, qualities, such as the various Sky Deities like Zeus (Greek), Thor (Norse), Jupiter (Roman) and Taranis (Gaulish).

Today our knowledge of differing Deities allows the luxury of picking and choosing the ones we like best. Our ancestors, however, did not have this knowledge. If they were in

Greece, they would have known only the Grecian Deities; if in Peru, it would have been those of the Incas, and so on - until they came into contact with another race of people and their subsequent Deities. An overlapping from matriarchal to patriarchal cultures also becomes apparent.

When one culture was taken over by another, Deities of the first were often adopted or became, as is believed the case with many Goddesses, subordinate to the God of the conquerors - a wife, daughter, concubine, or even enemy. A prime example of this is the Goddess Hera. We have heard of the long suffering and over-jealous wife of Zeus, the chief Grecian Deity and Thunder God, but there is little awareness that Hera is actually a much older Deity, who had a completely different role than what we associated her with today.

Barbara Walker, in her book *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* mentions that Hera's name may have been He Era, "the Earth", a later version of the pre-Hellenic Great Mother, Rhea. Both were forms of the Great Goddess of early Aegean civilisation, who predated the appearances of the other Gods. It was the Hellenic writers, therefore, who were said to have "married" this Great Goddess with Zeus, and maybe their constant struggles reflect the conflicts between the early patriarchal and matriarchal cults.

Other Deities were blended to represent both the original culture and that of the conquering one. In Britain, for example, the Goddess of the healing springs of Bath in southern England was known as Sulis by the local Britons. However, after the conquering Romans, this Deity became known as Sulis-Minerva as the Romans often did not replace the original Deities with their own.

Today, we can select a variety of Deity depending on our own personal preference. But how do we do this? In order to understand the various Pagan Deities, and discover how to interact with them more easily, we need to study them and strike up a relationship with them. Their stories can be found in the ancient worldly myths and legends, folklore, and even faerytales. Images can be found in art galleries and museums, and if we are lucky enough, we can visit the lands from which they came. Keeping in mind that when reading the stories they might not necessarily be the original ones. As many traditions were originally oral, the stories have been translated, retranslated, and even watered down to fit morals of the time, such as during the recording of myths in the Victorian era.

The world of myth keeps the stories of Deity alive. We read about the adventures, the trials and tribulations of these Divine beings, and often can see similarities in our own lives. It is through discovery the stories of Deity that they become more than just faceless names on a page. They reveal to us that they are aspects of the Universal energy, the Divine consciousness, and so are we.

About the Author:

Frances has been a student of metaphysics and the occult for most of her life, with her formal training having commenced in 1993. She has been initiated into the Alexandrian Wicca tradition, with interests also in ceremonial magick, the Qabalah and traditional Wytchcraft.

After founding the Temple of the Dark Moon in 1999, Frances spent some six years as secretary for the Pagan Alliance Inc (SA) where she worked closely with both the Police and Attorney General with respect to changes in legislation. She has led rituals with Chief Druid, Philip Carr-Gomm, and occult philosophy Ramsay Dukes, as well as presented lectures at various national and international events.

Frances regularly writes for *Insight*, Australia's number one spiritual lifestyle magazine, with her articles also appearing in over 10 separate publications, including *Spellcraft*, *The Cauldron*, *Circle* and the Llewellyn's *Witch's Calendar*. She has further essays in a number of anthologies including *The Faerie Queens*, *Unto Herself: A Devotional Anthology for Independent Goddesses*, and *Memento Mori*.

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