

**Divine Feminine in Various Traditions including Christianity and Judaism for
Initiates and Members
of
Circulos Tenebris Matrem Arcanas
Circle of the Dark and Mysterious Mother**



Introduction

The divine feminine is a key aspect of many traditions and are key in both Kabbalah and Gnosticism. Both Kabbalah and Gnostic Christianity mythos, practice, and belief structure is all centered on the experience of God as Mother and Daughter/Bride. It is more well known that all “pagan” religions have an aspect of deity that are female. This study guide is not meant to be an exhaustive treatise on the divine feminine, but instead a brief overview to give context into the topic. There is a focus on kabbalistic and gnostic aspect of the divine feminine because for most people it is the least known topic on the subject.

European Paganism

Indo-European Tradition

We no longer have knowledge of what the proto-Indi-European Tradition believed or how they practiced their religion, but scholars have been able to piece together some clues based on the later Traditions and the Indo-European languages. Scholars have taken the current Indo-European languages (Celtic languages, English, German, French, Spanish, Sanskrit, etc.) and backtracked to a possible form of the original language. It is, of course, not perfect, but it gives them many clues as to how these ancient people may have thought.

Horse Vs. Cow Goddesses

The Indo-European scholars have surmised that all Goddesses that come from the Proto-European tradition started as either horse or cow goddesses. Cow Goddesses are focused on fertility, abundance, culture, and life; where the horse goddesses being wild are focused on death, transformation, war, and the darker side of experience.

Male and Female

Almost all pagan religions pair gods and goddesses into consorts. This isn't surprising since ancient peoples saw both humans and animals reproducing in heterosexual pairings. There are, of course, exceptions where gods or goddesses are solitary and not paired with another deity.

Triple Goddess

Because some goddesses are associated with the moon, they are often depicted as triple goddesses. The three aspects are usually maiden, mother, crone to represent the stages of the moon and the stages of life.

The Dark Mother

The Dark Mother is the aspect of goddess that is focused on the darker aspects of life. She is not evil, but handle death, rebirth, war, and transformation. The Dark Mother comes from the horse goddess tradition and is a wild force of nature that cannot be tamed.

Judaism

The Jewish religion is believed to be between 4,000 and 5,000 years old, although it may be even older. Legend says that the first Jews were Abraham and Sarah who came from the city of Ur in Sumeria. Because the Jewish people have been exiled from their homeland so many times (Egypt, Persia, Babylon, Rome) the Tradition has taken on influences from many different cultures.

Names of God

In Judaism, there are multiple names for God. The names represent different aspects or personalities of God along with His/Her attributes. Judaism is a monotheistic religion, so these are not separate Gods and Goddesses, but aspects of the One. Some of these names represent female personalities of God; God as Mother.

The word Adonai in Hebrew is literally translated Lord in English. However, Adonai refers to God as with us on Earth. This aspect is always seen as female, and thus Adonai actually refers to Mother God as Mother Earth and God with us.

The secret name of God in Judaism, YHWH, has a literal meaning of “He who was, is, and shall be.” This name represents Father God, but there is an inner secret to the name. This name is made up of four Hebrew letters: Yod, Heh, Vav, Heh. This represents what later became the trinity in Christianity (since there are four letters, but only three unique ones). These letters represent God as Father, Mother, Son, and Daughter/Bride (with the Mother and Daughter sharing the letter Heh and being represented by Holy Spirit).

Another name in Judaism that represents God as Mother is Elohim. Elohim is a masculine noun with a feminine plural. El literally means God, thus Elohim is God that manifests in multiple male and female personalities. This aspect of God is Supernal Mother. Mother God that holds creation in her womb and is the partner of YHWH (Father God).

Many Christians will recognize the Judaic name for God, El Shaddai. There was a popular Christian song about this name sung by Amy Grant. The root of this name, Shaddai, has many meanings, but one interpretation is “Many-breasted one.” The imagery is of God nourishing the earth.

Shekinah means God’s presence and power. This aspect of God is the Hebrew name most closely related to Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Shekinah has two aspects: Upper Shekinah (Mother) and Lower Shekinah (Daughter/Bride). Shekinah is God all around us, in us, and Mother of all creation.

The First Women

A discussion of the first women in Judaic creation stories taken from Genesis is something that must be addressed when discussing the Divine Feminine. As this section progresses, it will become clear why. The story of the creation of mankind in Genesis seems to have two different stories. The first is in Genesis 1:26-27 and the second is in Genesis 2:21-22.

Genesis 1:26-27: Then Elohim said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So Elohim created mankind in his own image, in the image of Elohim he created them; *male and female he created them.*

Genesis 2:21-22: So YHWH Elohim caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then YHWH Elohim *made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

In Jewish Midrash (extra-Biblical texts) these two stories are analyzed to show a very different view of the creation of man than is generally considered in traditional Christianity. The first story is interpreted to mean that two equal human souls were created at the same time: Adam and Lilith. Adam and Lilith are each both male and female to be like Elohim. Adam takes the more masculine role and Lilith the feminine. Midrash goes on to say that when Adam tries to dominate Lilith she rebels, speaks the secret name of God, and flies out of Eden. She is enraged by Adam, knowing she is equal to him. God then sends three angels to Lilith to try to get her to return to Adam. Unfortunately, they try to threaten her with destruction if she doesn’t return. Lilith, knowing who she truly is, tells them that she cannot be destroyed, or creation will dissolve because she is a vital part of its fabric. At this point she feels abandoned by both Adam and God, causing her to fall into rage. When she is replaced by Eve, she is transformed by her hatred and anger, causing her to birth demon children

whose purpose is to torment Adam, Eve, and their offspring. We will hear more about Lilith later in this study guide.

The second story from Genesis 2 is interpreted in midrash to mean that when Lilith didn't return, God decides to create a partner for Adam out of Adam's very being. As we saw earlier, Adam is seen as both male and female, so God takes Eve (or Havah in Hebrew) from Adam's side (not his rib as is commonly translated) to create two beings from one. Adam is the male half of the original Adam and Eve is his feminine half.

These two first women are seen as more than just the Mothers of humanity and demons, but as aspects of God emanated into creation. Lilith understands this, and this is why she can leave Eden and know that the angels' threats are meaningless. In Judaic midrash, both Lilith and Eve are much more than they appear in canonical scripture.

Other Judaic Concepts

Asherah is mentioned several times in Jewish scriptures but generally in a negative connotation. Scholars (see the book *The Hebrew Goddess* for more information) believe that Asherah was the name of the consort of YHWH in early Judaism. There are many statues and references to Asherah as being the name of Shekinah that is YHWH's partner. Even the Jewish kabbalistic book, *Zohar*, mentions that Asherah was the name of Mother God, but that "others have taken her name for their Goddess, so the Jewish Rabbis have distanced themselves from her name."

Asherah is the feminine form of the Hebrew word Asher which means "Who." At the burning bush when Moses asks God what name to call Him, God answers, "Eheieh Asher Eheieh" (I Am Who I Am). So, Asherah is "Who" and a feminine face of God.

In Israel and Judah, there were Asherah poles or Asherah trees used to represent the Mother. When these were co-opted by other religions (most notably the cult of Baal) the Asherah poles were destroyed and her worship stopped. However, the Jewish menorah is a modern representation of the original Asherah trees.

Matronit is a term used in later Jewish midrash to reference Shekinah as God the Father's consort. The Matronit is Mother God, but when the people are not following God and acting out of ego, then Lilith becomes the consort of the Father while the Matronit is in exile.

The Jewish Sabbath or Shabbat in Hebrew is their holy day that goes from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. This is not just a day of rest, but a time for the people to unite Shekinah and God the Father. Often Shekinah is referred to as the Queen of Shabbat and the one who rules over this holy day.

Christianity

In traditional Christianity, many aspects of the Divine Feminine have been lost and suppressed. However, there are some notable exceptions.

Mother Mary

Mother Mary, the mother of Yeshua, has been pretty much ignored by Protestants; however, Catholicism has venerated Mary as the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven. She is considered the immaculate conception and Catholics regularly pray to her for intercession. We will discuss Mother Mary more in the Gnostic section of this study guide.

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene is only mentioned by name a few times in the New Testament, but her story has captured the minds and hearts of many Christians. There are several unknown women in the story of Yeshua, and a woman named Mary of Bethany. None of these are explicitly linked to Magdalene but have been associated with her over the centuries. It is unknown which are her and which are not.

What is known about Magdalene from canonical scripture is that Yeshua cast seven demons from her, she is one of the few of Yeshua's followers that are at the cross during the Crucifixion, she assists in his burial, and she is the first to see him after he rises from the dead. These few glimpses into her life make her an important part of Christian tradition. Magdalene is called the Apostle of the Apostles because she is the first to see the Risen Christ and the first to proclaim that he is alive to the other Apostles.

Many have said that she is called Magdalene because she is from a town called Magdala, but some scholars disagree because the town in question had a different name during Yeshua's lifetime. It has been proposed that her title of The Magdalene actually comes from a Hebrew phrase, Magdal-eder, which means Tower of the Flock.

Myths and legends of Magdalene say that she left the Holy Land and traveled to France by boat, taking her young daughter, Sarah, with her (some have claimed this to be her child with Yeshua). In Southern France during her Holy Day, people take to the streets carrying boats through the city to commemorate her arrival. We will discuss more about Mary Magdalene in the Gnostic section of this study guide.

Black Madonnas

Throughout Europe there are statues and paintings that depict a Holy Mother and Child, much like those of Mary and baby Yeshua, but both figures are painted jet black. The images do not appear to be African in nature, but completely black versions of the Traditional Mother and Child. Little is known about the origin or purpose of the Black Madonnas, but some believe that the black coloring is used to represent wisdom. The Mother is thought by some to be Magdalene and by others to represent Mother God.

Guadalupe

Guadalupe is a manifestation of Mother God that appeared to a native man named Juan Diego near Mexico City in December, 1531. She identifies herself as both the Mother of Christ and the Aztec Goddess, Tonantzin. She has Juan Diego go to the bishop in the area to request a church be built on the hill where Juan meets her. After several attempts by Juan to persuade the Bishop, Guadalupe gives him Spanish roses to take to the prelate (that did not grow in the New World and should have not been blooming in December). Juan Diego presents the Bishop with the flowers and his cloak has an image of Guadalupe on it. The image is rich in imagery and detail. A shrine is eventually built to Guadalupe which still stands today.

Here is how Guadalupe describes herself to Juan Diego:

She said to him, "Know, my youngest child, I am the Forever Whole and Perfect Maiden Saint Mary, Holy Mother of God, Holy Mother of the Giver of Life, Holy Mother of the Creator of the Human One, Holy Mother of the One-Who-Is-Distant-And-Near, Holy Mother of the Creator of the Heaven and the Earth, Primordial Wisdom, the Great Grandmother of All."

Later She is described as: "Queen of Space, the Sky-Dancing Maiden"

"He fell at her feet, knowing in her Eagle Woman, Snake Woman, War Woman, Infernal Woman – the Woman of All Womanhood, the Great Mother."

And: "The Forever Whole and Perfect Maiden replied, 'Understand and know, my youngest child, nothing should frighten or concern you. Do not worry. Do not be afraid of the sickness, or any other illness or hardship.

Am I not right here who is your Mother? Are you not under the shadow of my wings, under my protection? Am I not the foundation of your being, your sustenance, your happiness, peace and effortlessness? Are you not in the fold of my garment, I who am the Weaver-Of-All, the Weaver of the Web of Life? Do you need anything else? Do not allow anything to worry or disturb you anymore.”

Other Manifestations

There have been other instances of the Mother appearing in various images, such as at Lourdes and Fatima.

Gnostic Christianity

The word Gnostic is a Greek word that means “one who knows.” Because of this aspect of knowledge, many believed that the Gnostics claimed “secret” knowledge. However, anyone who studies Gnosticism understands that it actually means one who has experiential knowledge. The only reason it is secret is because everyone must experience for themselves.

Between 100 and 300 CE, there were two major schools of Gnosticism: Valentinians and Sethians. The Valentinians were non-dual, respected Judaism, and wanted to work with the church. Sethians were dualistic, thought the God of the old testament was the evil demiurge, and wanted to separate from the church. These Traditions may have disagreed on many things, but they both venerated the Divine Feminine and had similar views on this topic.

Sophia

The word Sophia is Greek for Wisdom. There are several times that Sophia is used in the Greek translations of the Bible where the word is capitalized to denote God’s Wisdom. This aspect of God is seen by Gnostics as a feminine aspect of God. Sophia is much like the Hebrew Shekinah because there are two aspects of her. The first, the uncreated Sophia, is supernal and represents Mother God. The second, the created Sophia, is in the world and considered Daughter God or the Bride.

Pistis Sophia

Pistis Sophia is a Gnostic Gospel originally written in Coptic that details the story of a being of light. Her name is Pistis Sophia or Faith Wisdom. Pistis Sophia is distracted from the True Light by archonic (dark beings that like the Djinn in Islam) beings and falls into matter. The archons steal her light power and she is trapped. After uttering thirteen repentances that oscillate between mercy and judgment, the Risen Savior comes to restore her light and take her back into the realms of light. This myth is meant to represent all souls’ journeys as aspects of the Daughter/Bride.

Other Divine Feminine Aspects

There are other female aspects of God in Gnostic Scriptures including Barbello, Zoe, and various aspects of Sophia.

Mother Mary

In some Gnostic Traditions, Mother Mary is seen as an embodiment of the uncreated Sophia or Mother God. Traditions vary on what this means or how much of Sophia Mary embodies.

Mary Magdalene

The Gnostic Gospels have many stories about Mary Magdalene. Almost all represent her as at the very least the most inner student of Yeshua. She understands his teachings and energetic transmissions when the male disciples do not. She is literally the “star” of these stories, second only to Yeshua. Magdalene is seen as the embodiment of the Created Sophia who is Daughter/Bride.

Bridal Chamber

Bridal chamber is a concept in Gnosticism where Christ the Sophia and Christ the Logos (female and male aspects are joined together in unity). This is representative of our joining with Christ in full conscious unity. Human and God become one.

Kabbalah

Jewish Kabbalah is an ancient form of mysticism and is much like Christian Gnosticism from a Jewish paradigm. There are many pre-Kabbalistic works that date back into antiquity, but the first truly Kabbalistic text is the *Sefer Yetzirah* written right around the time of Yeshua. There are many other Kabbalistic works, but the most notable is the *Sefer Zohar* (Book of Splendor). Kabbalistic teachings hinge on God as both Mother and Father, so Divine Feminine references and concepts are part of its foundation.

Sefirot and The Tree of Life

The central glyph for Kabbalah is called the Tree of Life. This glyph consists of ten Sefirot (or spheres of light) and 22 paths (represented by the Hebrew alphabet). The ten Sefirot are aspects of God that represent Divine Names and Divine personalities. The tree is divided into three pillars, with the left pillar representing the female force of God, but in reality, each Sefirah is male to the Sefirot below and female to the Sefirot above. With that being said, we will discuss a few of the Sefirot and their relationship to the Divine Feminine.

Binah, meaning Understanding, is the third Sefirah in the Tree of Life. This energy of God manifests at the same time as her partner, Hokmah and both emanate from the “no thing” of Keter. Binah is called the Palace of God and represents all the archetypal forms of creation. Binah’s Divine Name is Elohim (discussed previously) and her personality is Aima (Mother God). This is Shekinah in the supernal realm.

Gevurah, meaning Severity, is the first feminine Sefirah outside of the supernal realm. Her Divine Name is Elohim Givror, but sometimes called Elohim. Gevurah is another aspect of Divine Mother just inside of creation.

Malkut, meaning Kingdom, is the last Sefirah on the Tree of Life and called the Fruit of the Tree. The Divine Name is Adonai (discussed earlier), but the personality is Daughter (Nukva) and Bride (Kallah). This is the Shekinah in creation. The Daughter and Bride manifests as both light and dark aspects. Kali Kallah (or Black Bride) is Lilith.

In Kabbalah, the Mother that transcends the entire tree, covering both the supernal realm, creation, and everything in between is Asherah. The Mother as “Who” is the means of enlightenment and liberation for all beings through the descending and ascending energy of the Tree of Life.

Holy Union

One of the key concepts of Kabbalah is the Holy Union of masculine and feminine. In the supernal realm, Mother (Aima) and Father (Abba) join and creation manifests through multiple dimensions into our universe. Once creation manifests, the purpose of creation is the joining of the Son and the Daughter. When this occurs, the Daughter (Nukva) becomes Bride (Kallah). This paradigm represents the rejoining of creation with Her heavenly consort and a return to supernal realm. As the Son and Bride merge, they become Father and Mother. Shabbat is the celebration of this union by holding a vision for the “world to come” when this unification has occurred.

Magdalene

Magdalene also takes on a very special role in some gnostic mythos as embodying both Eve and Lilith, the two primordial women (pure mercy and pure severity). In this mystical act she unites the two, redeems them, and creates true, complete female humanity. This is parallel to Yeshua's work as Christ the Logos (enlightened word) to redeem the first Adam and his dark counterpart, Samael (Poison of God). Yeshua is said to have ascended when his work on earth was done. Magdalene on the other hand has vowed to reincarnate in the body of a woman until the second coming is complete (the enlightenment and liberation of all humanity).

Shekinah and Lilith

Shekinah is God's female presence and power on earth. She is the Holy Spirit and the Queen of Shabbat. It is said that when the Shekinah is absent, Lilith takes over as the consort of the Father. Lilith is the Dark Mother and the embodiment of severity.

In Kabbalah, the Sefirah Malkut is "The Kingdom." This is the world around us. Malkut is sometimes associated with Shekinah (the female aspect of God's presence and power - the Mother), but sometimes she is associated with Lilith (a dark female aspect of God). Whether our world is Shekinah or Lilith is completely dependent on the choices we make and the view we take of the world. It is we who decide whether she will appear merciful or severe. However, both of these manifestations facilitate the will of God by bringing the world closer to enlightenment and liberation through spiritual evolution. It is our choice and one we must make every moment of every day.